PARTISAN REVIEW

PR

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER, 1942

Guglielmo Ferrero
by Ignazio Silone

The Profession of Poetry
A Reply to M. Maritain
by Harold Rosenberg

The World Historians
From Turgot to Toynbee
by Karl Korsch

Pacifism and the War
a controversy
by D. S. Savage, George Woodcock, Alex Comfort, and George Orwell

5

35¢ A COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Coming - a special issue of P. R.:

"THE NEW FAILURE OF NERVE"

Gilbert Murray once ascribed the collapse of the Roman civilization to a "failure of nerve" in the face of the barbarian threat. There have been of late years many ominous signs in our culture that history may repeat itself.

This special issue of PARTISAN REVIEW will analyze the obscurantist tendencies gathering force in the cultural world today: the revolt against reason and the scientific method; the exaltation of mystery as a mode of knowledge; the recrudescence of reactionary theories about "human nature"; the revival of religiosity and supernaturalism; the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach; the new sociotheology of Original Sin.

Articles will be contributed by John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Meyer Schapiro, Ernest Nagel and others.

The ANTIOCH REVIEW

A NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE QUARTERLY

IN THE FALL ISSUE

The Sense of the Present in Thomas Mann
Edwin Berry Bergum

More Taxes—Less Fiscal Mythology
John C. Sparks

— ALSO —

Ideological Warfare . . . . . **James M. Burns**
A Future for the Jews . . . . . **William Zukerman**
Some Problems in Economic Reconstruction . . . . . **Lewis Corey**
Hemisphere Solidarity . . . . . **Earl K. James**

— AND OTHERS —

THE ANTIOCH REVIEW, YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO

$2.00 a year, $2.25 in Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME IX, No. 5 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1942

THE WORLD HISTORIANS	354	*Karl Korsch*
THE TENDENCY OF HISTORY	372	*Henry Adams*
FERRERO AND THE DECLINE OF CIVILIZATIONS	379	*Ignazio Silone*
POEMS		
The Son of God	384	*Harvey Breit*
The Statues in Parliament Square	386	*Julian Symons*
Reflections in Bed	387	*Julian Symons*
IN MEMORY: L. D. TROTSKY	388	*Victor Serge*
THE PROFESSION OF POETRY	392	*Harold Rosenberg*
PACIFISM AND THE WAR: A Controversy	414	*D. S. Savage* *George Woodcock* *Alex Comfort* *George Orwell*
BOOKS		
Old Methods, New Horizons	422	*F. O. Matthiessen*
A Slum on the Way to the End of the Night	426	*Gertrude Buckman*
Confound the Wiseguy	428	*H. J. Kaplan*
Locating the Enemy		
1. The Nazi Behemoth Dissected	432	*C. Wright Mills*
2. Something New on the New Order	437	*J. R. Stanwell*
With the Little Mags	440	*Harvey Breit*
LETTERS	445	
CONTRIBUTORS	413	

Editors: CLEMENT GREENBERG, DWIGHT MACDONALD, GEORGE L. K. MORRIS, WILLIAM PHILLIPS, PHILIP RAHV. Business Manager: NANCY MACDONALD.

The articles in PARTISAN REVIEW, *whether written by editors or contributors, represent the point of view of the individual author, and not necessarily of the editors.*

PARTISAN REVIEW is published at 45 Astor Place, New York, N. Y.

PARTISAN REVIEW is published six times a year. Subscription: $1.50 yearly; Canada, $1.65; other foreign countries, $1.80. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright September, 1942, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Reentered as second-class matter, January 20, 1940, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World Historians

Karl Korsch

THERE IS NO DOUBT that world history is being made today on a grandiose scale. To what extent, we must ask, was the approach of these events reflected in the historical thought of the preceding generation?

For a preliminary answer we turn to a speech that was addressed by an American historian to the people of the last American frontier twenty-eight years ago:

> "Across the Pacific looms Asia, no longer a remote vision and a symbol of the unchanging, but borne as by mirage close to our shores and raising grave questions of the common destiny of the people of the ocean. The dreams of Benton and of Seward of a regenerated Orient, when the long march of westward civilization should complete its circle, seem almost to be in process of realization. The age of the Pacific Ocean begins, mysterious and unfathomable in its meaning for our own future."*

This was indeed a powerful vision of historical developments which then lay far ahead of the generation that was to experience the first and the second world wars. Yet it appears on closer scrutiny that even this most dynamic of American historians was not fully aware of the terrible challenge to the whole traditional structure of his world which was to arise from the events which he so confidently predicted. To him, the "age of the Pacific Ocean" was simply the next great step in a continuous movement in which every preceding step had likewise been part of the march into a "mysterious and unfathomable" future. All existing civilization he conceived as a "westward civilization," and he joyfully quoted a European witness for the assertion that in its uninterrupted westward expansion "the land which has no history reveals luminously the *course of Universal History*." The map of the United States today, Turner said, "lies like a huge page in the *history of society*." "Line by line as we read this continental page from West to East, we find the *record of social evolution*." (My emphasis—K.K.)

To show the precarious nature of this world-historical concept

*F. J. Turner, Commencement Address, University of Washington, June 17, 1914—reprinted in "*The Frontier in American History*."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we must go back into the preceding centuries of European and American thought. We have to show how illusory were the dreams of the classical philosophers and historians of the bourgeois epoch who imagined that in some way they were dealing with the Universe while all the time they dealt with an exceedingly small sector of that Universe. Like their despised predecessors in an earlier epoch and, in fact, like any isolated tribe in some remote or inaccessible corner of the earth, they mistook their own habitat for the whole world. We must follow some of the intricate ways in which they tried to make up for that secretly felt deficiency. We must reveal the political, economic and social aims that were hidden behind those ideological self-deceptions. We shall finally show the various, and variously frustrated, attempts that were made during the last phase to break through those barriers and to transform the universal history of the bourgeois class of the West into a really universal history.

1.

World history as it developed during the last two hundred years was not an entirely new growth. The world historians of this period are linked in one close line of descent to those inspired scholars who during the first centuries of the Christian era had drawn the outlines of a providential world history which was further developed by a series of clerical historians from Augustine in the 4th to Bossuet in the 17th century. The history of the progressive evolution of human society from the Stone Age, Primitive Man or the Ape to the perfect freedom of reason, democracy or socialism, as worked out by the latter-day philosophers, is nothing but a secularized form of the "holy history" of their predecessors. They had dealt with the same "universal" process as a progressive unfolding of Christendom from Adam or Creation to the Last Judgment; or, in a less Utopian mood, to the establishment of a universal Catholic church.

The general acceptance of the arbitrary distinction between a "medieval" and a "modern" type of universal history by the bulk of present day "historians of history" is itself further proof of the tendency of the bourgeois newcomers to contrast their own new "universe" with the assumedly more restricted concepts of the so-called "Dark Ages." We note this tendency at the very begin-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ning of the new phase in the work of Voltaire.* He wrote his famous *Essai sur les moeurs* in 1740 for the express purpose of "debunking" the universally admired *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* of the illustrious Bossuet—just as his English contemporary, Edward Gibbon, wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* out of sheer spite, to reveal as one continuous retrogression the historical development of human society during the rule of Christianity. In the supplementary remarks to his work, Voltaire reports that he had undertaken the task for the benefit of one of his high-born lady correspondents who had complained that such an eloquent writer as Bossuet had in effect "forgotten the Universe in a universal history." He had neglected Russia which alone "is greater than the whole of the ancient Roman Empire"(!), and he had dealt with only three or four nations which had disappeared from the earth and had sacrificed even those to "the small nation of Jews which occupies three quarters of his work." Thus Voltaire, and likewise Gibbon, made a special point of treating in detail the history of far-away China which at that time was just being opened up to Western scholars through the researches of the Jesuit missionaries from 1675 to 1775. In the same way, one hundred years later, German philosophers exploited new discoveries about India and other Asiatic cultures which by that time had resulted from the recently initiated study of Sanscrit.

The inaugurators of the new, bourgeois type of world history took a great deal for granted when they imagined that the small beginnings of their "civil society" constituted a more comprehensive "universe" than that of their predecessors. There is little difference in this respect—and none in favor of the new-comers—between their concepts of the historical process and those of Eusebius, of Augustine, and of his pupil Orosius. In his *Seven books of history against the Pagans,* the latter had set himself the task of rewriting the whole of known history as the history of the sufferings and the final triumph of the Christian church. (This was exactly the same mood, and almost the same words, in which in the

*We do not deal in this study with the two great fore-runners who stood outside the great stream of modern European history and whose work is therefore not typical of the developments traced in the text. The less important is Vico, the Italian, who published his *Scienza Nuova* in 1715. Incomparably greater is Ibn Khaldoun, the Arab, who lived in 14th century Spain and Africa.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

19th century the French historian Thiers proposed to himself to rewrite all history as the history of the bourgeois class.)

The new, secularized form of medieval Christian history which arose in the 18th century never recaptured that true universalist spirit that had been achieved by the early historians of Catholicism and of the various Gnostic systems of the East. These had dealt with world history as, in Spengler's words, "a unique and supremely dramatic act, having as its theatre the lands between Hellas and Persia and as its subject matter a catastrophe, an epochal change of phase between world-creation and world-decay." Incidentally, this same world-historical conflict between Asia and Europe had already been the great theme of Herodotus; and another almost equally great subject had been dealt with by Polybius. He had described "by what means and under what kind of policy almost the whole inhabited world was conquered and brought under the dominion of the single city of Rome, and that too, within the period of not quite fifty-three years."

2.

Where, then, are those great accomplishments which must have been present at least during the first part of our period and because of which the development of universal history and philosophy from the later half of the 18th to the first half of the 19th century will rank, for a long time to come, as a classical achievement of human thought?

This question is answered in an incredibly superficial manner by the bulk of modern critics in both Europe and the United States. The century here considered, i.e., the century of the great French Revolution, was in fact one of the most sophisticated periods of human thought. The greater part of the objections advanced today against the unwarranted "philosophical" assumptions of such writers as Turgot, Condorcet, St. Simon, Kant, Schelling, W. von Humboldt, and Hegel do not deal with the real problem at all. At best they only repeat the arguments that were raised over and over again by the classical historians themselves against every conceivable shade of a religious, metaphysical, moral, teleological or otherwise not strictly empirical approach to the subject matter of historical research. Modern writers on historical methodology often fall far below the level that had been reached in an era which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was aptly described by one of its great representatives as "a glorious sunrise" and as a veritable revolution in every field of human-social activities including the realm of thought.

We cannot hope to deal here with the whole extent of the problem. Nor can we discuss the change of function which the historical philosophy of this epoch underwent when the actual work of the bourgeois revolution had been done—that is, its increasing restriction to the realm of abstract thought. It is the philosophical shadow-boxing of this last phase rather than the real achievements of the whole epoch that survived in the memory of succeeding generations.

In the following paragraphs we propose to describe, in a few abbreviated formulae, the ultimate form of the daring innovations which the concept of history underwent during this epoch and which, in our view, have not been refuted but at best have been forgotten by the later generations of historians.

1) From existing in both space and time, world history was transformed into *a process that moved essentially in time.* "History in general," according to Hegel, "is the development of Spirit in Time, as Nature is the development of the Idea in Space."* This utterly idealistic concept of history seemed so obvious to the last generation that even people who were not at all inclined to accept the description of Nature as "the development of the Idea" were quite willing to accept the distinction between Nature and History as things that existed mainly in space or mainly in time respectively. Even a thorough anti-idealist like Marx went on record with the phrase that "time is the space of human development."

2) By the same token, history was described as *an essentially "internal" rather than an external development.* While none of the great philosophical historians neglected the task of taking full account of the available facts and of their various physical, organic, and psychological interconnections, they thought that the ultimate subject of history lay in some way beyond, or "inside," the world of visible and tangible phenomena. Given events and series of events were regarded by them as a starting point for the true historian rather than as the essential contents and significance of the historical movement.

---

*Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1822-31)—English translation by J. Sibree (London 1902) p. 75.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These two changes seem to the writer much more fundamental than the question as to whether the whole process is to be regarded as the development of an "idea" (mind, reason, various other spiirtual entities), or as the development of either physical or social "matter." Even the difference between the predominantly idealist conception of history represented by all bourgeois philosophers up to Hegel and the predominantly materialist conception represented by Marx is hereby demoted to a secondary distinction. *In the 20th century both Hegelian idealism and Marxian materialism* survived only for the purpose of mutual political vilification. The new problems which are bound up with the concepts of history and universal history arise, as will be shown later, from an entirely different basis and must be solved in an entirely different manner.

Even less important today are the problems of a so-called unrestricted "perfectibility" of the human race or society or of any other noun connected with the adjective "human." In the same category belong the slightly less obsolete problems of "progress," progressive (or retrogressive or mixed) "evolution," and of any other essentially uni-linear development of a presupposed capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself in the quasi-providential course of the historical process. Even Hegel knew that "the general thought—the category which first presents itself in this restless mutation of individuals and peoples existing for a time and then vanishing—is that of *change at large*." (Op. cit., p. 75-6) In this assertion he was joined one hundred years later by the forerunner of present-day Nazi geopolitics, Friedrich Ratzel. In spite of his general insistence on the laws of the external processes of history (the laws of space, position, physical movements, "blood and soil") rather than on those of an internal development, Ratzel was still prepared to admit "one general law of internal development, the law of *variation*."* The whole talk about a primarily internal or a primarily external development results, in the last instance, from an unwarranted generalization of one or another of the specific forms in which oppositions and struggles arise in a particular society either from without or from within, in different phases of its historical development.

All the characteristics of classical bourgeois world history discussed so far can be regarded as attempts at an ideological com-

*Ratzel, *Raum und Zeit*, ed. Paul Barth, Leipzig (1907) p. 69.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pensation for a secretly felt deficiency. Here belong also many other tendencies that arose in the further development of bourgeois world history during the 19th century; among them such real achievements as 1) the successive extension, following every new expansion of the capitalist "world market," of the field of historical research to hitherto neglected countries; 2) the progressive extension of genuine historical research to the formerly so-called "pre-historical" epochs; 3) the widening of the subject matter of history by the inclusion of new realms of human activity. All these theoretical developments can be realistically explained by an underlying tendency towards world conquest which, according to the theory of Marx, arises from the insatiable need of capital for an ever increasing accumulation. What bourgeois society was lacking in world-wide extension, the bourgeois historians tried to make good by various forms of a never satisfied quest for universality. This game went on until the two revolutionary crises of 1830 and 1848.

3.

A critical phase for universal history began after 1850, when the revolutionary tendencies of the bourgeois class had finally petered out in the abortive revolution of 1848. For the first time the European bourgeoisie had accepted the frustration of its own aims by the victorious restoration of an autocratic monarchy in Prussia and by a quasi-Fascist counter-revolution in France rather than risk a further advance of the new revolutionary movement of the proletarian class. From here on all "Philosophy of History" and every form of "Universal" or "General" History fell into almost universal contempt. The energies of the greatest masters of history, even more so the life work of minor historians up to today, were turned to that highly specialized research which alone was now recognized as true historical "science."

This tremendous change in the history of history is best illustrated in the case of one man who lived through these two phases. No sharper contrast can be imagined than that between the scope and importance of the work that the German historian Mommsen published in 1855-56 before he had completed his thirty-ninth year, and his subsequent publications. The later volumes of his collected works are aptly described by A. J. Toynbee as "so many volumes of a learned periodical which happens to have had only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one contributor." The same spirit of the times which transformed the author of *The History of the Roman Republic* into an editor of Latin inscriptions, transformed Lord Acton from the prospective author of a (never completed) "History of Liberty" into the founder of that cooperative enterprise of minute specialism that became *The Cambridge Modern History.*

The nature of the hidden force that changed the whole spirit of history after the second half of the 19th century in Europe and a little later, but even more completely, in the United States, is explained by a number of more or less critically-minded observers as "a sort of industrial revolution," a carrying over of the economic techniques of the modern "factory system" to the field of historical research (Shotwell). "Since the days of Mommsen and Ranke," says Toynbee, "historians have given their best energies to the 'assemblage' of raw materials—inscriptions, documents, and the like—in 'corpus'es and periodicals; and, when they have attempted to 'work' these materials 'up' into 'manufactured' or 'semi-manufactured' articles, they have had recourse, once again, to the Division of Labour and have produced synthetic histories."

In a slightly less sweeping manner the transition from a highly generalized form of historical thought to a strictly specialized "scientific" research can be compared to the analagous development that had taken place somewhat earlier in the realm of physics. Here "philosophy of nature" has been entirely repudiated. It has been most successfully replaced by a system of specialized sciences, and the only mystery consists in the question of how the system of physical sciences could have preserved some kind of intrinsic unity in spite of the complete destruction of all its general principles achieved as early as 1748 by the criticism of Hume which in some variant or other has generally prevailed among men of science.*

Yet neither of the two analogies is sufficient to explain the phenomenon. The development which led the later 19th and the 20th century historians to discard all philosophy in favor of specialized research has not produced anything like a truly universal historical science. It has only deprived modern historians of those remnants of unity and universality which their thought had still retained from the religious and metaphysical traditions of the past.

*See A. N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (1925) pp. 5 ff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is nothing in the loose, fragmentary, and occasional "alliance of history with practical politics" which could have rendered to the disconnected and widely divergent historical studies the same service which the intimate *alliance of science with technology and industry* has rendered to the sciences proper.

The cooperation and division of labor that is characteristic of modern industry has been only superficially duplicated in the realm of historical thought. The "industrialization of history" has in many cases reproduced the pathological features of the industrial system without reproducing its positive results. Every critical observer is aware of the utter dependence of present-day historical research on the hazard of existing "raw materials" and on the other hazard of the invention of new tools and machinery. For example, as Toynbee points out, a great number of modern historians have turned to the study of the Dynasty of the Ptolemies in Egypt rather than to that of the immensely more important and historically interesting Dynasty of the Seleucids in Asia simply because the "Ptolemaic papyri" offered the richest mine of unworked raw material in this field.

Thus it appears that the present-day organization of historical research does not even reflect that comparatively unsatisfactory regulation of industrial production which prevailed in the earliest phases of "free" commodity production and which was in fact instrumental in keeping the sciences proper in line. Industrial production is bound, after all, by the laws of the market; a commodity must have some social utility to be sold; its "use-value" appears in its "exchange-value." No similar "automatic" self-correction results from the pseudo-"market" for which the specialized historical scholars produced their often entirely useless commodities. The picture is not improved by the *institutionalization* to which the scientific production of the American scholars has been recently subjected through the increasing control and direction of their formerly "free" activities by the powerful scientific Foundations. Here as in other fields the mockery of a "planned" production that is superimposed on the market by the increasing influence of monopoly capitalism has only disturbed the automatic self-corrections, such as they were, that existed in an earlier phase, without replacing them by effective planning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

4.

The only way in which the sum total of the specialized historical researches might have become the truly universal historical science of the unphilosophical second half of the 19th century would have been by adopting the materialist conception of history which, at the crucial moment, was presented to the tottering system of bourgeois historical thought by the theoretical representatives of the socialist movement. Here, as in other respects, the theory of Marx was in fact not so much the opponent as the true inheritor of that classical philosophy which the bourgeoisie had created during the phase of its own revolutionary ascendency. Like Turgot and all other historical philosophers, Marx conceived of history as a progressive development of humanity. His claim that "all (written) history is the history of class struggles," that "these class struggles are bound up with the progressive development of the productive forces of society," and that "the next phase of this historical progress presupposes the emancipation of the proletarian class," was not different in principle from the claims raised in preceding epochs by the founders of the early Christian philosophy of history and by their successors, the founders of classical bourgeois philosophy. There is one point in which Marx was an even truer disciple of the great classical tradition of the revolutionary bourgeoisie than were the latter-day bourgeois historians themselves. The conscious alliance of historical theory with the revolutionary practice of the proletarian class which was now proclaimed by Marx went far beyond that superficial alliance of history and politics which had been practiced occasionally by such early representatives of bourgeois thought as Machiavelli. By placing the aims and tactics of the proletarian class struggle on a strictly "material" basis, Marx tried to extend to the historical and social sciences that intimate connection with technology and industry which in respect to the physical sciences had already been so successfully established by the bourgeoisie itself.

Yet there is no need to deal further with the potentialities that were inherent in the materialist conception of history in a now forgotten epoch. The whole scheme has not been tested in the manner in which it was conceived at the decisive historical moment. What survived under the name of "historical materialism" among the second generation of the Marxist orthodoxy in Germany and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Europe after the death of Marx was no longer different in principle from the pseudo-scientific achievements of the bourgeois historians previously discussed. "Scientific socialism" as conceived by Bernstein and Kautsky, Hilferding and Renner, no longer had any higher ambition than to be admitted to the realm of the established bourgeois sciences. The true significance of the Marxian attempt at conceiving world history as a progressive revolution was soon forgotten on all sides, just as was the true significance of its counterpart, the idealist philosophy of Hegel.* Universal history, as far as it survived at all, was left as a sideline for professional historians like Ranke who could be trusted to decide the problem of what belonged and what did not belong to a professionally understood universal history—not by any theoretical principle, but by the use of his "scientific tact."

5.

The next phase of universal history which began near the end of the third quarter of the 19th century and lasted until the first world war, 1914-18, can be described, in the view of the writer, as the age of monopoly-capitalism and imperialism. The alternative theory of the predominance of so-called "finance capital," promoted before the first world war by the Austrian socialist Hilferding, has been entirely refuted by later developments. It survives today only in the state-controlled ideologies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Witness the oft repeated references to the "leading bankers and plutocrats" in Stalin's May Day Order, as reported by the *New York Times*, May 1, 1942.

During this phase, Western civilization indeed came near fulfilling the conditions which had been fictitiously assumed for so long by its historians. It cast the net of its economic system around the world and brought under its sway the whole of mankind and all the habitable lands and navigable seas on the face of the earth. Western technics and industries, Western sciences and Western institutions, were eagerly imitated in the four quarters of the globe. The whole contemporary world seemed converted into a single world market, the fifty to sixty existing states united in a single "comity of nations."

Such conditions might have been expected to lead to the

*See the author's *Marxismus und Philosophie*, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1930 pp. 49 ff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

renaissance of a universalistic trend even in the thoroughly "specialized" field of the historical sciences. Yet any tendency in this direction had to overcome a set of formidable obstacles, and when "universalism" finally reappeared in the historical thought of a generation that had gone through the first world war, it had acquired an entirely different character.

The actual result of the "Westernization" of the universe was indeed too different from that world unity which had been the dream of earlier generations of universal historians to deceive any but the most credulous victims of that system of illusions and pretensions which was the League of Nations. On the political plane, the conflicting interests of nations had been replaced by graver conflicts between the so-called "Great Powers"; on the economic plane, competition by individual traders in the "free" world market had been superseded by a struggle for monopolistic control of ever widening "spheres of influence." In total, this new universe was nothing but a universal extension of that "*warre of every man against every man,*" as the nature of capitalist society had been described in its very beginnings by the author of *Leviathan.*

The naive cosmopolitanism of the age of the Enlightenment, when Voltaire and Gibbon treated such remote countries as China and India in a mood of respect and curiosity, had been turned into an atmosphere of mutual contempt and hostile indifference between East and West. The humble Dutch trader who for more than two centuries had willingly endured, year after year, the most excruciating penalizations in his tiny insular ghetto off the Japanese port of Nagasaki for the privilege of holding his ground and making his money, had changed his ethos when his status had been reinforced by the guns of Admiral Perry's squadron in Yedo Bay in 1853. The last illusions of the age of Free Trade were scattered by the All-Western Crusade against the Boxer Rebellion in Peking, 1900.

Thus it is little wonder that the first important work on universal history that resulted from the new period in no way pointed to the renaissance of a cosmopolitan and optimistic mood. Spengler's magnum opus, *The Decline of the West,* which appeared in war-torn Europe in 1918-22, was indeed the first manifestation of a new tendency in historical thought. It inaugurated, with all its old-fashioned philosophical style, the only form of world history

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which is still possible in the modern world. Yet, at the same time, it did not free itself entirely from the fatal ambiguity pervading all previous phases of the bourgeois epoch.

Just as previous historians had represented the necessity of the accumulation of capital as an eternal law of progress and the creation of the world market as a world wide expansion of the blessings of civilization, so the philosopher of *The Decline of the West* translated the present troubles of big business into the terms of a cosmic catastrophe.

The optimistic mood of the earlier phases is replaced in Spengler by skepticism and despair. Yet this is only a transition from one to another form of the ideological glorification of an unsatisfactory reality. The "pessimism" of monopoly capitalism is no more realistic than the "optimism" of Free Trade.

6.

The decisive step taken by Spengler and followed in a perhaps even more important work by the English historian Arnold J. Toynbee,* consists in a break with the strange illusion that had beset all previous philosophers and historians. They had mistaken their own civilization for the only existing *Civilization* (in the singular and with a capital C) that needed to be taken care of in a truly "universal" history. The stubbornness with which this barrier of Western historical thought persists to the present day is well illustrated by the tremendous contradiction between the purported and the real scope of recent history books. Thus we find that even a bold broadener of the narrow concepts of traditional history proposed in one of his volumes to deal with "the background of contemporaneous ways of doing and thinking not only in Europe but in North and South America, Australasia, latterly, even in India, Japan, western Asia, and Africa," but actually discussed extra-European affairs only in a single chapter (18 out of a total of 770 pages) under the well known aspect of "*The Expansion of European Influence in the 19th Century.*"*

This strange pre-Copernican view which regards its own restricted sphere as the center if not as the whole extent of the "world" has prevailed during the last two hundred years among

*A Study of History, vols. 1-3, London 1934, vol. 4-6, London 1939. No fewer than three additional volumes will follow.

*T. H. Robinson, *The Ordeal of Civilization*, New York, 1926 pp. 4; 615-32.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the most "cosmopolitan" liberals as well as among the most "international" socialists. Except for the revolutionary Marxists and a few anthropologists, the only people who opposed the narrowness of the one-civilization concept of the Western historians, and who can thus be regarded in a sense as forerunners and allies of the new pluralistic world history of Spengler and Toynbee, are to be found in that counter-revolutionary undercurrent of 19th century historical thought which kept itself comparatively free from the intoxications of the age of progress. Here belong, to mention only writers who have exerted a lasting influence, certain early Romanticists (F. Schlegel), the older generation of the "Historical School" (Moeser, Herder, Goethe), the Frenchman de Gobineau, and the whole school of German "Geopolitics" from Ratzel to Haushofer.

For a discussion of the new, pluralistic type of universal history we need not deal in detail with a number of important theoretical problems which are solved in different ways by Spengler and by Toynbee. The decisive question was not into how many independent civilizations the one Civilization of the preceding phases should be split—whether into eight, as in Spengler, or into twenty-one, as in the more elaborate, less dogmatic, and empirically much better founded scheme of Toynbee. The important point was to split it at all. The narrow unitarian concept had become ever more untenable, not only on theoretical grounds but also because the dream of world-unification on a Western basis had entirely outlived its former practical expediency. The world wide expansion of Western technics, science, political and economic institutions, nationalism, methods of warfare, had turned out to be not at all equivalent to a transformation of the whole world into one huge colony of the West. It had created new weapons which the peoples of China, Japan, India, and the Arabian world in Eastern Asia and Egypt could turn against the Western aggressor. Thus it became necessary for the Western powers to find new and more efficient weapons, and for the Western historians to form the new concepts of a world in which those weapons could be used. We shall presently see how this practical problem is approached by the new Geopolitics of German totalitarianism.

First, a rapid glimpse at the incredibly increased scope of the new type of universal history contrasted with the narrow circle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in which its predecessors had moved, and of the tremendous vitality of its new problems.

The historical and methodological unit in Toynbee's theory of civilizations is not the national state nor even its enlarged present-day form, the so-called Great Power. Like de Gobineau, Marx, and Spengler before him, he starts from the more comprehensive concept of a "society" which to him is equivalent to one of the several co-existing "civilizations." As already mentioned, he distinguishes twenty-one such independent civilizations—not counting four embryonic civilizations that have never come to birth, and five or six other civilizations which have not developed but have been "arrested" after birth. Of those twenty-one civilizations all but seven are now extinct, and the majority of these seven are unmistakably in decay.

This picture might appear almost as somber as Spengler's theory of universal decline. Yet in fact each of those successive phases: *Genesis, Growth, Breakdown, Disintegration of Civilizations,* encloses centuries and millenia of tremendous activity, drama and adventure, challenges and responses. Even the phase of the "*universal state*" which may or may not be passed by a particular civilization is not conceived, like Spengler's "Caesarism," as the static end-phase of a totally exhausted culture. It is described as a new attempt at rallying all the remaining vital energies of a declining civilization which may postpone its progress towards final disintegration for an indefinite time. Even when the ultimate eclipse of a moribund society takes place, there is still the possibility of a regeneration. A new society may arise through the combined effect of two actions: that of an "internal proletariat" which secedes from the dominant minority within the old civilization, and that of an "external proletariat," from without. Like many other features of Toynbee's theory, this scheme of the emergence of a new society from the womb of a pre-existing civilization which has lost its creative power is strongly reminiscent of the well known Marxian scheme of the "social revolution."

Neither Toynbee nor Spengler can be described as conscious supporters of present-day Nazism. Professor Toynbee is definitely opposed to all tenets of racism, nationalism, and militarism; judging from the contents of his work, his main allegiance is to the Christian faith. Even Spengler, who certainly rendered an im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mense service to the Nazi movement by his destructive criticism of all ideas that might have strengthened the tender growth of a genuine democratic and pacifist spirit in republican Germany after 1918, must rather be classified with Hugenberg, Thyssen and Rauschning as the herald of a "conservative revolution." It is certain that he did not hail Hitler as the leader and savior of the German empire—or was not given a chance to do so—after the victory of Nazism in 1933.

Nevertheless both Toynbee and Spengler have contributed more than anybody else to the theoretical foundations of that truly "new history" which had its first practical application in the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and in the outbreak of the present world war. This is confirmed by Toynbee himself. When he published his first three volumes in 1934, he still believed, to a certain extent, in a new age (assumedly inaugurated by the First World War, the League of Nations, and the Kellogg Pact) in which the corporate consciousness of communities would no longer aspire at being "universes in themselves" but rather at being "parts of some larger universe." But he had abandoned all such hopes when he published the second three volumes in 1939. His assertion this time was that "the common goal towards which our post-war Capitalist and Communist states are headed is a totalitarian régime in a parochial socialist national state which commands the religious as well as the political allegiance of its subjects and imposes itself upon their souls as their supreme and indeed exclusive object of worship." It is to be hoped that this assertion of Toynbee will not be confirmed so fully and so quickly as his other amazing prediction made before the outbreak of the present war concerning the fate of the Maginot Line under the assault of the "militarized mechanics" of the German Reichswehr.

7.

What are the practical consequences of a condition in which the existing powers will have abandoned every aspiration to be "parts of some larger universe" rather than "universes in themselves"? A one-sided and partial answer—but an answer backed by a tremendously successful action—is given by the new theories of Nazism.

The Geopolitics of totalitarianism have finally repudiated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all concern for the world as a whole just as they have abandoned the restricted program of a narrow nationalism. Instead, they constructed for themselves a half-way house between the *world*, which seemed too large for the more intense form of subjugation which was now intended, and the *nation*, which was too small. The new habit of "thinking in big spaces," the so-called "Pan-ideas" proclaimed by Haushofer and his disciples all over the world, is applied in the attempted subdivision of the world into a "Western Hemisphere," a "United States of Europe, Africa, and the Near East," a "Co-Prosperity Sphere of Eastern Asia," and in many similar schemes that are quickly invented, modified, and rejected under the impact of changing developments and new possibilities offered by every new phase of the present world-wide war.

Yet this is only one aspect of the historical *Weltanschauung* of the totalitarian movement. Nazism as a whole is still closely bound to an utterly skeptical and pessimistic outlook in regard to the wider possibilities of its own historical action. Instead of using the greater potentialities that the Copernican turn of world history has opened up for an unfettered world-historical action, the Nazis still cling to Spengler's pessimistic theory of an inevitable decline which was described above as merely a new form of the earlier historians' optimistic belief in a continuous progress—an optimism in reverse. This allegiance to an obsolete historical philosophy—a philosophy of monopoly-capitalism rather than of revolutionary historical action—not only pervades the speeches of the Fuehrer and of such ideological representatives of Nazism as Moeller van den Bruck, Juenger, and Rosenberg, but appears even in Haushofer. Again and again he interrupts his penetrating inquiries into present-day possibilities of a totalitarian "*Weltpolitik*" to engage in a tortuous argument for the proposition that in spite of the relentless rule of destiny and Spengler's theory of decline there may still be a chance of rejuvenating the political life and imperialistic growth of a people that for once had already "outrun its course" and exhausted its creative and dynamic abilities. "It is this venture in which Italy, Germany, Japan have boldly engaged, and which is today being undertaken by the rising millions of India and China in their gigantic effort towards national self-government."*

*Karl Haushofer, *Weltpolitik von heute*, Berlin, 1934.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The contrast between the outdated historical philosophy of Nazism and the daring novelty of its political aims points to a fatal ambiguity within the Nazi movement itself. Despite the claims of some of its most ardent friends and foes, the primary goal of Nazism in its present form is not a radical transformation of the existing order of society. All we can say is that in the unequal battle against the superior resources of its enemies, the Nazi power has endeavored to strengthen its position by a simultaneous attack on the whole internal structure of present-day society. Yet this remained a strictly ancillary part of the totalitarian war effort, a subordinate form of a primarily belligerent action.

There is, therefore, no point in comparing that peculiar combination of war and civil war which is the present-day Nazi movement to the great revolutionary movements of a past epoch. While it was characteristic of the revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries that their contents went beyond the moderate aims of their initiators, Nazism presents the spectacle of a loudly advertised "revolutionary" action which at the same time attempts to control, and to reduce to a minimum, the inevitable results of its own subversive exertions. Though Nazism is at its best in the art of war, the peculiar half-heartedness of its revolutionary tendency affects in the end even the conduct of the totalitarian war.

Unlike the wars of the French revolution, the "revolutionary war" of Nazism did not gain in momentum with its further extension in time and space. A first loss of dynamic energies could be observed after the termination of the temporary alliance between Germany and Russia when the Nazi armies attempted to turn the "Blitz" against their former totalitarian ally. A further change in the same direction has been in the making ever since the entry of the U. S. and Japan transformed an essentially European war into a veritable crisis of the existing world order.

In the midst of an unprecedented world-historical struggle, Nazism seems to shrink from the risks and consequences of its original revolutionary strategy. Thereby it demonstrates the intrinsic limits of a counter-revolutionary movement in contrast to a genuine revolution. From this source is derived the extraordinary ambiguity which pervades the world-historical theory—together with its other phases—of contemporary totalitarianism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Tendency of History[1]

Henry Adams

Henry Adams' little-known statement of the peculiar problems facing the modern historian seems to us worth reprinting here because of its intrinsic documentary interest and because of its relevance to the articles in this issue by Korsch and Silone.—THE EDITORS.

Guada'-c-jara, December 12, 1894.

Dear Sir:

I regret extremely that constant absence has prevented me from attending the meetings of the Historical Association. On the date which your letter mentions as that of its first decennial I shall not be within reach. I have to ask you to offer my apology to the members, and the assurance that at that moment I am believed to be somewhere beyond the Isthmus of Panama. Perhaps this absence runs in some of the mysterious ways of nature's law, for you will not forget that when you did me the honor to make me your president I was still farther away—in Tahiti or Fiji, I believe—and never even had an opportunity to thank you. Evidently I am fitted only to be an absent president, and you will pardon a defect which is clearly not official, but a condition of the man.

I regret this fault the more because I would have liked to be of service, and perhaps there is service that might be usefully performed. Even the effort to hold together the persons interested in history is worth making. That we should ever act on public opinion with the weight of one compact and one energetic conviction is hardly to be expected, but that one day or another we shall be compelled to act individually or in groups I cannot doubt. With more anxiety than confidence, I should have liked to do something, however trifling, to hold the association together and unite it on some common ground, with a full understanding of the course which history seems destined to take and with a good-natured willingness to accept or reject the result, but in any case not to quarrel over it.

No one who has watched the course of history during the last

[1]A communication to the American Historical Association, as President of the Association. Reprinted from Adams' *The Degeneration of the Democratic Dogma*, by permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

generation can have felt doubt of its tendency. Those of us who read Buckle's first volume when it appeared in 1857, and almost immediately afterwards, in 1859, read the Origin of Species and felt the violent impulse which Darwin gave to the study of natural laws, never doubted that historians would follow until they had exhausted every possible hypothesis to create a science of history. Year after year passed, and little progress has been made. Perhaps the mass of students are more skeptical now than they were thirty years ago of the possibility that such a science can be created. Yet almost every successful historian has been busy with it, adding here a new analysis, a new generalization there; a clear and definite connection where before the rupture of idea was absolute; and, above all, extending the field of study until it shall include all races, all countries, and all times. Like other branches of science, history is now encumbered and hampered by its own mass, but its tendency is always the same, and cannot be other than what it is. That the effort to make history a science may fail is possible, and perhaps probable; but that it should cease, unless for reasons that would cause all science to cease, is not within the range of experience. Historians will not, and even if they would they can not, abandon the attempt. Science itself would admit its own failure if it admitted that man, the most important of all its subjects, could not be brought within its range.

You may be sure that four out of five serious students of history who are living today have, in the course of their work, felt that they stood on the brink of a great generalization that would reduce all history under a law as clear as the laws which govern the material world. As the great writers of our time have touched one by one the separate fragments of admitted law by which society betrays its character as a subject for science, not one of them can have failed to feel an instant's hope that he might find the secret which would transform these odds and ends of philosophy into one self-evident, harmonious, and complete system. He has seemed to have it, as the Spanish say, in his inkstand. Scores of times he must have dropped his pen to think how one short step, one sudden inspiration, would show all human knowledge; how, in these thick-set forests of history, one corner turned, one faint trail struck, would bring him on the highroad of science. Every professor who has tried to teach the doubtful facts which we now call history must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have felt that sooner or later he or another would put order in the chaos and bring light into darkness. Not so much genius or favor was needed as patience and good luck. The law was certainly there, and as certainly was in places actually visible, to be touched and handled, as though it were a law of chemistry or physics. No teacher with a spark of imagination or with an idea of scientific method can have helped dreaming of the immortality that would be achieved by the man who should successfully apply Darwin's method to the facts of human history.

Those of us who have had occasion to keep abreast of the rapid progress which has been made in history during the last fifty years must be convinced that the same rate of progress during another half century would necessarily raise history to the rank of a science. Our only doubt is whether the same rate can possibly be maintained. If not, our situation is simple. In that case, we shall remain more or less where we are. But we have reached a point where we ought to face the possibility of a great and perhaps a sudden change in the importance of our profession. We cannot help asking ourselves what would happen if some new Darwin were to demonstrate the laws of historical evolution.

I admit that the mere idea of such an event fills my mind with anxiety. When I remember the astonishing influence exerted by a mere theorist like Rousseau; by a reasoner like Adam Smith; by a philosopher, beyond contact with material interests, like Darwin, I cannot imagine the limits of the shock that might follow the establishment of a fixed science of history. Hitherto our profession has been encouraged, or, at all events, tolerated by governments and by society as an amusing or instructive and, at any rate, a safe and harmless branch of inquiry. But what will be the attitude of government or of society toward any conceivable science of history? We know what followed Rousseau; what industrial and political struggles have resulted from the teachings of Adam Smith; what a revolution and what vehement opposition has been and still is caused by the ideas of Darwin. Can we imagine any science of history that would not be vastly more violent in its effects than the dissensions roused by any one or by all three of these great men?

I ask myself, What shape can be given to any science of history that will not shake to its foundations some prodigious interest?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The world is made up of a few immense forces, each with an organization that corresponds with its strength. The church stands first; and at the outset we must assume that the church will not and cannot accept any science of history, because science, by its definition, must exclude the idea of a personal and active providence. The state stands next; and the hostility of the state would be assured toward any system or science that might not strengthen its arm. Property is growing more and more timid and looks with extreme jealousy on any new idea that may weaken vested rights. Labor is growing more and more self-confident and looks with contempt on all theories that do not support its own. Yet we cannot conceive of a science of history that would not, directly or indirectly, affect all these vast social forces.

Any science assumes a necessary sequence of cause and effect, a force resulting in motion which cannot be other than what it is. Any science of history must be absolute, like other sciences, and must fix with mathematical certainty the path which human society has got to follow. That path can hardly lead toward the interests of all the great social organizations. We cannot conceive that it should help at the same time the church and the state, property and communism, capital and poverty, science and religion, trade and art. Whatever may be its orbit, it must, at least for a time, point away from some of these forces toward others which are regarded as hostile. Conceivably, it might lead off in eccentric lines away from them all, but by no power of our imagination can we conceive that it should lead toward them all.

Although I distrust my own judgment and look earnestly for guidance to those who are younger than I and closer to the movement of the time, I cannot be wholly wrong in thinking that a change has come over the tendency of liberal thought since the middle of the century. Darwin led an intellectual revival much more hopeful than any movement that can now be seen in Europe, except among the socialists. Had history been converted into a science at that time it would perhaps have taken the form of cheerful optimism which gave to Darwin's conclusions the charm of a possible human perfectibility. Of late years the tone of European thought has been distinctly despondent among the classes which were formerly most hopeful. If a science of history were established today on the lines of its recent development I greatly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fear it would take its tone from the pessimism of Paris, Berlin, London, and St. Petersburg, unless it brought into sight some new and hitherto unsuspected path for civilization to pursue.

If it pointed toward a socialistic triumph it would place us in an attitude of hostility toward existing institutions. Even supposing that our universities would permit their professors in this country to announce the scientific certainty of communistic triumphs, could Europe be equally liberal? Would property, on which the universities depend, allow such freedom of instruction? Would the state suffer its foundation to be destroyed? Would society as now constituted tolerate the open assertion of a necessity which should affirm its approaching overthrow?

If, on the other hand, the new science required us to announce that the present evils of the world—its huge armaments, its vast accumulations of capital, its advancing materialism, and declining arts—were to be continued, exaggerated, over another thousand years, no one would listen to us with satisfaction. Society would shut its eyes and ears. If we proved the certainty of our results we should prove it without a sympathetic audience and without good effect. No one except artists and socialists would listen, and the conviction which we should produce on them could lead only to despair and attempts at anarchy in art, in thought, and in society.

If, finally, the science should prove that society must at a given time revert to the church and recover its old foundation of absolute faith in a personal providence and a revealed religion, it commits suicide.

In whatever direction we look we can see no possibility of converting history into a science without bringing it into hostility toward one or more of the most powerful organizations of the era. If the world is to continue moving toward the point which it has so energetically pursued during the last fifty years, it will destroy the hopes of the vast organizations of labor. If it is to change its course and become communistic, it places us in direct hostility to the entire fabric of our social and political system. If it goes on, we must preach despair. If it goes back, it must deny and repudiate science. If it goes forward, round a circle which leads through communism, we must declare ourselves hostile to the property that pays us and the institutions we are bound in duty to support.

A science cannot be played with. If an hypothesis is advanced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that obviously brings into a direct sequence of cause and effect all the phenomena of human history, we must accept it, and if we accept it we must teach it. The mere fact that it overthrows social organizations cannot affect our attitude. The rest of society can reject or ignore, but we must follow the new light no matter where it leads. Only about two hundred and fifty years ago the common sense of mankind, supported by the authority of revealed religion, affirmed the undoubted and self-evident fact that the sun moved round the earth. Galileo suddenly asserted and proved that the earth moved round the sun. You know what followed, and the famous "E pur si muove." Even if we, like Galileo, should be obliged by the religious or secular authority to recant and repudiate our science, we should still have to say as he did in secret if not in public, "E pur si muove."

Those of us who have reached or passed middle age need not trouble ourselves very much about the future. We have seen one or two great revolutions in thought and we have had enough. We are not likely to accept any new theory that shall threaten to disturb our repose. We should reject at once, and probably by a large majority, a hypothetical science that must obviously be incapable of proof. We should take the same attitude that our fathers took toward the theories and hypotheses of Darwin. We may meantime reply to such conundrums by the formula that has smoothed our path in life over many disasters and cataclysms: "Perhaps the crisis will never occur; and even if it does occur, we shall probably be dead." To us who have already gone as far as we set out to go, this answer is good and sufficient, but those who are to be the professors and historians of the future have got duties and responsibilities of a heavier kind than we older ones ever have had to carry. They cannot afford to deal with such a question in such a spirit. They would have to rejoin in Heine's words:

> Also fragen wir beständig,
> Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll
> Erde endlich stopft die Maüler,
> Aber is das eine Antwort?

They may at any time in the next fifty years be compelled to find an answer, "Yes" or "No," under the pressure of the most powerful organizations the world has ever known for the suppression of influences hostile to its safety. If this association should be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gifted with the length of life that we all wish for it, a span of a century at least, it can hardly fail to be torn by some such dilemma. Our universities, at all events, must be prepared to meet it. If such a crisis should come, the universities throughout the world will have done most to create it, and are under most obligation to find a solution for it. I will not deny that the shadow of this coming event has cast itself on me, both as a teacher and a writer; or that, in the last ten years, it has often kept me silent where I should once have spoken with confidence, or has caused me to think long and anxiously before expressing in public any opinion at all. Beyond a doubt, silence is best. In these remarks, which are only casual and offered in the paradoxical spirit of private conversation, I have not ventured to express any opinion of my own; or, if I have expressed it, pray consider it as withdrawn. The situation seems to call for no opinion, unless we have some scientific theory to offer; but to me it seems so interesting that, in taking leave of the association, I feel inclined to invite them, as individuals, to consider the matter in a spirit that will enable us, should the crisis arise, to deal with it in a kindly temper, and a full understanding of its serious dangers and responsibilities.

Ever truly yours,

HENRY ADAMS.

Herbert B. Adams, Esq.,
Secretary, etc., American Historical Association.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ferrero and the Decline of Civilizations

Ignazio Silone

TOWARDS 1898 Ferrero set himself to study the history of the Roman Empire with the express intention, as he himself has frankly admitted, of discovering in it some kind of fundamental law about the evolution and decline of human societies. And since whenever a convinced believer seeks he invariably finds, Ferrero likewise managed to discover a truth which for the rest of his life was to remain the food of his meditations. In reading Sallust, Livy, Virgil, he was immediately struck by the fact that the things which we today usually appreciate and admire, such as building-up of power, acquisition of wealth, refinement of social customs, were by them, on the contrary, defined and regarded as corruption. The ancient authors were therefore far from being unaware of the causes which were about to determine the ruin of the Roman Empire and Ferrero took on himself the mission of reviving this consciousness, developing it, deepening it, and deriving from it a universal criterion. After the completion of his vast work, *The Greatness and Decline of Rome*, he returned to the scrutiny of his own times. His travels on both sides of the Atlantic showed him a world in the flower of civil and economic development. Enlightened by Sallust, Livy, Virgil, he was prompt to discern in this world the symptoms of its future disintegration. In the general optimism then prevailing, his warnings rang like those of a hysterical Cassandra, and he was mocked and derided, especially by his compatriots; but it was not long before events confirmed his words.

The fact that a forecast has proved accurate is of course inadequate to establish as scientific the theories on which it is based. People endowed with extreme physical sensibility, rheumatic people for instance, can often predict storms; but it is not the rheumatism that produces the storm, and a meteorological observatory cannot base its conclusions on rheumatism. Nevertheless, he is often and justly punished who, on leaving home in the morning, laughs at his rheumatic friend because the latter warns him, despite the clear sky and radiant sunshine, to go back and fetch his raincoat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ferrero collected his judgments and prophecies on the modern world in a series of dialogues which he entitled *Between Two Worlds* because the interlocutors were passengers on board a transatlantic luxury liner sailing from Europe to America. They were society people, adventurers, profiteers, people who had "arrived"; optimistic, ingenuous and also rather grotesque, as vulgar people almost always are when they think themselves happy; people of unlimited material possibilities. But it was this very absence of limits, seemingly guaranteeing to modern man an absolute sovereignty over nature and society, that began to alarm Ferrero. He defined modern civilisation as *quantitative*, in contrast to ancient civilisations which were *qualitative*. In Ferrero's mind, a qualitative civilisation is one which has clearly defined limits, has models of moral and esthetic perfection, is based on certain virtues, draws its inspiration from certain forms of beauty. Up to the time of the French Revolution and the nineteenth century, humanity, according to Ferrero, had created only qualitative civilisations; but the French Revolution brought chaos in its wake, it gave rise to a civilisation aimed exclusively at riches and power, it swept away the ancient boundaries and was incapable of creating new ones. A quantitative civilisation, in the eyes of Ferrero, is not a real civilisation, but a tumultuous transition, a parenthesis, a fearful interregnum, a tragic adventure; in it there can be no security.

Ferrero was the poet of conservative anguish in an epoch of transition. In giving voice to the longing of every man for a just and ordered society, he struck profoundly human chords, but he could never overcome his horror of everything new, of adventure, as he called it, and his deep attachment to antiquity. Without a minimum of common assurances, it is not possible for men to live together in society. If they are not to massacre each other, men must agree on a certain number of fundamental questions; what is good, what evil; what is true, what false; what is beautiful, what ugly. Ferrero wanted to be the historian of transition periods. He studied and analysed the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the third century, the end of the French monarchy in the eighteenth, the collapse of the Central and Eastern European monarchies in our own century, and the subsequent defeat of the democracies. He made his personal drama out of the death of civilisations. These events, in themselves far apart and unconnected, were in his vision of them bound together by the same chain of causes. Isolat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing them from their concrete and historical backgrounds, he gave himself up to the study of their formal and psychological elements. The old principles are breaking down, the old religion leaves the souls of men indifferent, the old morality has grown ridiculous, the old art leaves people cold; but the new class which is gaining the upper hand in society is incapable of founding a new discipline and of fixing boundaries which will be accepted by everyone because recognised by everyone as being true, just and good. Up to the time of the first world war Ferrero's thought had been chiefly busied with the moral and esthetic aspects of the death of civilisations; the reading of Talleyrand suggested to him a complementary theory that fitted its political aspects. He read Talleyrand's memoirs when ill in bed in the early days of November 1918, in the very week, therefore, that saw the military collapse of the Central Powers; and this reading was for him a "tremendous flash of lightning" as he himself has said. Pages 155 to 162 of the second volume were a revelation to him. They are the pages in which Talleyrand expounds his doctrine of legitimate power and shows that a system of balance and a stable peace among European states are possible only if all these states are governed by legitimate powers, that is, powers conforming to a principle of right accepted by the subjects and respected by the rulers.

The definition of legitimacy found in Talleyrand completed those of quality and boundaries already formulated by Ferrero. Quality, boundaries, legitimacy; these became his trinomial. The world is in chaos because we no longer know on what principles the right of command and the duty of obedience are founded. Either men learn to live subordinating power to justice, or they perish. A society can have peace and security only if it is grounded on a legitimate order. We must not let ourselves be deceived by the grandiose constructions of modern political activism: they are edifices built on sand. The old monarchies have been destroyed, but sham democracies have crept into their places, mere show-window democracies; the old generals are still in command, they have replaced the plumed helmet by the Phrygian cap, they no longer believe in the emperor, but neither do they believe in the people. The instruments of democracy, such as universal suffrage, plebiscites, mass organisations, have turned against democracy; there is no longer accordance between end and means, between path and goal. The contradictions of the age of transition which Ferraro brought to light are the internal contradictions of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

superstructure; the contradictions are real and his analysis of them is competent, but the roots of the crisis and the solution of the crisis lie beneath them. Ferrero's preachings resemble the custom, formerly prevalent in some Catholic countries, of ringing the church-bells in times of pestilence in order to ward off the disease.

Ferrero's fate has been that of the "disarmed prophet" of whom Machiavelli spoke. The inefficacy of his apostolate came in the end to steep his soul in bitterness and steel his spirit towards the extreme consequences of his innate pessimism. In the end, the substance of history appeared to him as being, under different forms, always one and the same. Man is incapable of reconciling force with righteousness, matter with spirit, quantity with quality, measure with progress. In vain does culture seek to dam the onrush of innate human folly; its dikes are too fragile to stem the impetus of the forces tending to chaos. To what end does man exist? What are we doing here on earth? In his novels: *The Two Truths, The Revolt of the Soul, Blood and Sweat, Liberation,* Ferrero sought to give artistic form to this anguish of his. Here man is shown as a sort of prisoner and human life as a sort of prison. From the narrow windows of his prison man sees a limited horizon, but he knows that beyond there lies a vast, an infinite world, "his" world, the world from which he has been exiled and which he longs to know, but cannot. The torment of man is therefore the typical torment of the prisoner. He sets himself problems which he cannot solve, he aspires to a justice which is not of this world, to a perfection which eludes him, but which leaves him with a lingering nostalgia. The tragedy is that he is condemned for life to this prison and can leave it only as a corpse.

There is, I think, no need to say that in an epoch when thought is dominated by propaganda and optimism is obligatory even in cemeteries, the life of a man like Ferrero is inevitably hard. Ferrero has died in exile, but if the truth must be told, even in Italy he was already an exile. All his life Ferrero was alone. It can almost be said that he was a man born in exile, a man of a bygone age. He was the pathetic and mournful reincarnation, in our epoch, of an eighteenth-century moralist, with a few "scientific" notions borrowed from Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte. He won for himself a certain renown as a historian in France and the South American republics, countries in which historiography is still largely influenced by nineteenth-century ideas; but in Italy, after 1900,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after Antonio Labriola, Benedetto Croce, and Giovanni Gentile, he was a solitary wanderer in the world of culture. Stripped of its outdated theories, the real and undying value of Ferrero's work remains in the testimony of his own human destiny. He lived his life within the closed circle of his dreams. In Geneva he found asylum in an eighteenth-century mansion built by Italian artists in the old aristocratic and Calvinist quarter of the ramparts, where in former times there lived the families of refugees hunted from Italy by the Counter-Reformation. His house was always crowded with visitors. He usually sat in a corner, his arms folded, his face sad, remote, overcast; when he began to speak, everyone else was silent, and then he would pronounce grave sentences and peremptory judgment. He never failed to make a deep impression; the impression of a man absorbed by a sombre vision and living in that vision and seeing in it the passage of the centuries. The proud tenor and the integrity of his life inspired everyone with respect, but few even among the Italian emigrants were convinced by his ideas. Even in the opposition he was without a home.

The same criticism may be made of Ferrero as of the conservative humanism of Ortega y Gasset, Borgese, Huizinga; the criticism of all those who seek the Living among the dead. A society is renewed, on the contrary, when its humblest element acquires a value. Today the Living is to be found among the Negroes, in the Polish ghettos, among the Chinese coolies, among the peons, among the cafoni, among the proletarians. But for the aritsocratic Ferrero, all this was sordid materialism. He was fond of quoting the invective of the dying Orlando from his son Leo's play "Angelica": "Interest, ignoble filthy crust of the world. Men, why have you no longer faith in anything? Because you are nothing and you would measure the world by the yardstick of yourselves. You will always be unhappy if you persist in cherishing so mean a conception of happiness." He derived, as befitted his rôle, a certain satisfaction from his exile and his isolation, but it needed no great power of insight to see that, like the dying Orlando, he was tortured by homesickness for the great sun of his country, for its blond vineyards, for its twilights steeped in an immemorial languor, for its sea shimmering in a haze beyond the plains, for its gentle and devoted women, for its marble ruins, for its silences, for the desperate splendor of its cities. He loved his country, but in secret, like a lover that has been rejected.

Translated by Darina Laracy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems

Harvey Breit

THE SON OF GOD

1.

Lead him about. Tell him
Stars is soft. Sing lullaby.
Lock him up in lawns.
Make toys. Comb in his curls
To keep away the paler boys.
Place him among narcissi.
Sing lullaby.

2.

Confound him.
Drown his question.
Take him to the priest.
Shame him. Tell him
He is a Jew. Tell him
Karl Marx when he talks.
Tell him Judas Iscariot
When he kisses. Sew up
His eyelids. Open them
When they are webbed.
Then let him go. Tell him
Words is wind. Get him
A job. Raise him.
Get him a wife. Raise him.
Teach him America.
Fire him. Take him
To the priest. Take him
To a lawyer. Jail him.
Confound him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

3.

Confound him. Urge him
To put a question.
Take him to the priest.
Bless him. Take him
To the doctor. Heal him.
Open his eyes. Tell him
Jew, Democracy, the Soviet Union.
Fete him. Parade him.
Take him to his wife.
Tell him he is a lover.
Tell him words is true:
Bush, desert, tundra, jungle.
Oil, iron, rubber, rust.
Green, water. Blue, sky. Earth, red.
Tell him he has moved
From periphery to center.
Tell him he is a citizen.
Confound him.

4.

Bring him back. Tell him
Stars is soft. Sing lullaby.
Comb in his curls. Tell him
The loser lost. Tell him
Stars is soft. Lock him up.
Place him among narcissi
And lilies. Sing lullaby.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Julian Symons

THE STATUES IN PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Powerful, the myths stand up into the sky,
Solid and happy, legends of a life
They never knew, in which they did not lie,
Kept faith with friends and always loved their wife.

The politicians, Canning, Peel and Pitt,
Stand rigidly, outlines against the blue;
The eyeholes star, their stone lips wittily
Convey the antique faith, the always true:

'And is not death. Permanent is the wall
That the rich, rising state made out of pain.'
Above the clouds are birds, the bombers feel
For earth, the people run into a pen.

'And handled the abstractions, love and law,
Most skilfully, and for a country's good.'
Newspapers flutter in the wind, the poor
Read about life, and catch a tic of blood.

Immutable and cold in the gold air
The serious statues shame the flowing sun;
They make the people photographs in the square
Whose Desire-to-Be and Will-to-Die are one,

Whose uncertainty is fingers to their claws,
Whose dog-wet eyes their fine grey eyeholes mock,
Whose impermanence shudders away from wars
But breaks like water on these liars' rock.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sun fades and the statues fade, birds twitter
And drop from trees on Canning's old stone head;
The people pass and gently look, not bitter,
Upon these honourable and murderous dead.

REFLECTIONS IN BED

That time of revolution being come
At which the Fortunate Islands should be joined . . .
Put down the book: consider, consider always
The time of year, the state of health, the weather.
The month, June. Heart, rapid and irregular.
The day, fine: on Richmond river-bank
Talked to two girls. Later read Hardy:
Went to the cinema: prepared for death.
These are the affects of a revolution.
These are the sophistries of revolution.

The alert man lolls in bed waiting for bombs.
Cats and trains cry in the night. There are
More things in heaven and earth than we can hold.
The trams run away. The trains run away. Their thunder
Making a separate voice. And if in bed
Another body moves

Another hand and voice

Under the hand the velvet face of love,
A voice as warm and tender as a wound

Unripe for revolution or for death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Memory: L. D. Trotsky

(Murdered August 21, 1940)

Victor Serge

HE WAS HARDLY FORTY-FIVE when we began calling him "the Old Man," as we had Lenin at a similar early age. All his life he gave one the feeling of a man in whom thought, action and his personal life formed a single solid block, one who would follow his road to the end, on whom one could always absolutely depend. He would not waver on essentials, he would not weaken in defeat, he would not avoid responsibility or lose his head under pressure. A man with so profound an inner pride that he became simple and modest. Proving his powers at an early age (he was president of the first Petersburg Soviet in 1905, at 28), he was from then on sure of himself, and was able to look at fame, government posts, the greatest power, in a purely utilitarian way, without either contempt or desire. He knew how to be harsh and pitiless, in the spirit of a surgeon performing a serious operation. During the Civil War and the terror, he could write a sentence like: "There is nothing more human, in a time of revolution, than energy."

If I had to define him in one word, I would say he was a doer. Yet he was also attracted by research, by contemplation, by poetry and creation. Fleeing from Siberia, he could appreciate the beauty of the snowstorms; in the thick of the 1917 revolution, he speculated on the role of the creative imagination in such events; during his Mexican exile, he admired the amazing forms of the cactus plant and made expeditions to dig up fine specimens for his garden. A religious unbeliever, he was sure of the value of human life, the greatness of man, and the duty of serving human ends.

I never knew him greater, and he was never dearer to me, than in the dingy rooms of workers in Leningrad and Moscow, where I used to watch him, a few years earlier one of the two undisputed chieftains of the revolution, talk for hours in order to convince a few factory workers. Still a member of the Political Bureau, he was on the road to losing his power and probably also

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his life. (We all knew it, as did he, who spoke of it to me.) He had come to believe that it was once more on the order of the day to win over the workers one by one, as in the old days of illegality under the Czar, if revolutionary democracy was to be saved. And so thirty or forty poor workers listened to him, one or two of them perhaps sitting on the floor at his feet, asking questions and pondering his replies. We knew that we were more likely to fail than to conquer, but that too, we felt, would be useful. If we had not at least put up a fight, the revolution would have been a hundred times more defeated.

The greatness of Trotsky's personality was a collective rather than an individual triumph. He was the highest expression of a human type produced in Russia between 1870 and 1920, the flower of a half-century of the Russian intelligentsia. Tens of thousands of his revolutionary comrades shared his traits—and I by no means exclude many of his political opponents from this company. Like Lenin, like certain others whom the chances of the struggle left in obscurity, Trotsky simply carried to a high pitch of individual perfection the common characteristics of several generations of Russian revolutionary intellectuals. Glimpses of the type appear in Turgenev's novels, notably Bazarov, but it comes out much more clearly in the great revolutionary struggles. The militants of the Narodnaya Volya were men and women of this stamp; even purer examples were the Social-Revolutionary terrorists of the 1905 period, and the Bolsheviks of 1917. For a man like Trotsky to arise, it was necessary that thousands and thousands of individuals should establish the type over a long historical period. It was a broad social phenomenon, not the sudden flashing of a comet, and those who speak of Trotsky as a "unique" personality, conforming to the classic bourgeois idea of the "Great Man," are much mistaken. The characteristics of the type were:

a personal disinterestedness based on a sense of history;

a complete absence of individualism in the bourgeois sense of the word;

a strong impulse to place one's individuality at the service of society, amounting to a kind of pride (but quite without vanity or desire to "shine");

the capacity for personal sacrifice, without the least *desire* for such sacrifice;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the capacity for "toughness" in the service of the cause, without the slightest sadistic overtones;

a sense of life integrated with both thought and action which is the antithesis of the after-dinner heroism of Western socialists.

The formation of this great social type—the highest reach of modern man, I think—ceased after 1917, and most of its surviving representatives were massacred at Stalin's orders in 1936-7. As I write these lines, as names and faces crowd in on me, it occurs to me that this kind of man had to be extirpated, his whole tradition and generation, before the level of our time could be sufficiently *lowered.* Men like Trotsky suggest much too uncomfortably the human possibilities of the future to be allowed to survive in a time of sloth and reaction.

And so his last years were lonely ones. I am told that he often paced up and down his study in Coyoacan, talking to himself. (Like Tchernichevsky, the first great thinker of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, who, brought back from Siberia where he had spent twenty years in exile, "talked to himself, looking at the stars," as his police-guards wrote in their reports.) A Peruvian poet brought him a poem entitled, "The Solitude of Solitudes," and the Old Man set himself to translate it word for word, struck by its title. Alone, he continued his discussions with Kamenev—he was heard to pronounce this name several times. Although he was at the height of his intellectual powers, his last writings were not on the level of his earlier work. We forget too easily that intelligence is not merely an individual talent, that even a man of genius must have an intellectual atmosphere that permits him to breathe freely. Trotsky's intellectual greatness was a function of his generation, and he needed contact with men of the same temper, who talked his language and could oppose him on his own level. He needed Bukharin, Piatakov, Preobrajensky, Rakovsky, Ivan Smirnov, he needed Lenin in order to be completely himself. Already, years earlier, among our younger group—and yet among us there were minds and characters like Eltsin, Solntsev, Iakovin, Dingelstadt, Pankratov (are they dead? are they alive?)—he could no longer stride ahead freely; ten years of thought and experience were lacking in us.

He was killed at the very moment that the modern world entered, through the war, a new phase of his "permanent revolu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion." He was killed just for that reason, for he might have played too great a historical role, had he ever been able to return to the land and the people of that Russia he understood so profoundly. It was the logic of his passionate convictions, as well as certain secondary errors stemming from this passion, which brought about his death: to win over to his views an obscure individual, some one who didn't exist, who was only a decoy painted by the GPU in revolutionary colors, he admitted him to his solitary study, and this nobody, carrying out orders, struck him down from behind as he bent over a commonplace manuscript. The pickaxe penetrated the head to a depth of three inches.

(*Translated from the French by Dwight Macdonald*)

Coming in early issues:

Edmund Wilson: Ellen Terhune (a long story)

Katherine Anne Porter: The Season of Fear (a story)

Philip Rahv: The Heiress of All the Ages, A Study of the Heroine in Henry James

Rosa Luxemburg: Letters from Prison (a new series, hitherto unpublished)

Alex Comfort: English Poetry and the War

Hans Gerth: Karl Marx and Max Weber

Poems by John Frederick Nims, Isabella Fey, and Horace Gregory

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Profession of Poetry

OR, TRAILS THROUGH THE NIGHT FOR M. MARITAIN

Harold Rosenberg

JACQUES MARITAIN thinks of poetry as a practical activity carried on in a dangerous relation to spirit. Poetry, he maintains, is primarily a craft. Existing in the material world it has a "*raison*" of its own, needs and aims proper to its particular "making," on which every practitioner must unwaveringly fix his eyes. Indeed, the poet must hold more rigorously to his craft than the fabricator of chairs or hoe handles; because, dealing with spiritual substances, like the philosopher, scientist, or saint, he is constantly tempted by the soul, or absolute, lurking within his practice. Poetry's rebellious spirit is Beauty, an unlimited metaphysical power, which the written poem with its worldly conditions can never encompass. The demon dwells in the body of the art, but seeks to escape from it and abandon it to dissolution. And by a divine ordinance, no sooner does the apprentice forsake his bench than, inevitably, he is driven to poke among the infernal retorts.

Therefore, though he accompanies his advice with supernatural threats, Maritain urges a "materialistic," even a utilitarian, approach to the arts. His philosophy, to the surprise of those who expect just the opposite in a "religous" thinker, stresses the role of technique and professional discipline, opposes transcendental posturing, and sets up the work of art—not the soul-adventures of the artist—as the esthetic aim. It reminds the poet or painter that spiritual satisfaction is to be found in the artistic labor itself, precisely in the evolution of skill, in the formation of that individual "*habitus*" (a very eloquent word brought up to us from the Scholastics) which grows steadily more gracious and unerring, until it fills the whole being with light. . . . Moreover, Maritain's New-Catholic esthetics is linked with a social theory which provides a solid place for the artist in a community entirely given up to creation on the same modest, even, and spiritually progressive scale as his own. So that all burdens are lifted, except those fruitful ones inherent in the artistic work itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Prizing creative efficiency, social equality, and the dignity of labor, Maritain's values have a strong appeal to the modern mind. And were his artistic City of God left floating on high as an image of our ideals (executed as a Thomistic *collage*), who could object?

Alas, Utopias are never conceived for themselves, but always as a weapon against something that exists. In the case of Maritain, a weapon against modern art.

For, having attracted us with his workshop standards, his social dream, and his familiarity with vanguard art; having settled, too, with the spiritualism of cults other than his own; Maritain turns his apparatus upon the actual development of poetry in order to envelop it in a cloud of his own, from which the odor of sulphur is by no means lacking. As a theory of the history of poetry, his philosophy loses all trace of the realism contained in its static values and reveals itself to be nothing more than a system of polemical abstractions subtly promoting the interests of his Church in the contemporary war of authoritarian trends. This becomes clear when we contrast Maritain's interpretation with some of the positive features of poetry in our times.

With mixed feelings, Maritain finds* that since Poe and Baudelaire, poetry has represented a tremendous spiritual heresy and a nullity as art. Baudelaire "marks the discontinuity"; he drew the forbidden curtain dividing the workshop of poetry from its sacred chamber. At once the machinery of poetic production was thrown into disorder, and the most awesome convulsions have since been felt throughout the whole body of this ancient art. Its very identity has undergone alteration—instead of signifying the making of poems (a human activity), the word "poetry" now refers to the poems themselves (things), which contain all the mysteries of being. Modern poetry, fascinated by itself, has plunged into the mirror of self-consciousness, has become entirely a wrestle of spirit. The result has been a "*prise de conscience*" which, like the knowledge sucked from the apple of Eden, has inaugurated a course of change and suffering, disturbed by inner "crises of growth" whose end is not yet in sight.

*"Poetry's Dark Night" (*Kenyon Review*, Spring, 1942). The lecture published in *Kenyon* develops opinions and examples given by Maritain in *Art et Scolastique* (1920) and elsewhere.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the measure that poetry has concentrated upon itself, that is to say, upon spirit, its art has decayed. Hence poetry's night of the soul; profession no longer, it has isolated itself and by "its own trend allows no harmony with anything else."

Maritain quotes Baudelaire and Rimbaud to show their consciousness of poetry as a kind of *knowledge*, and finds in this effort towards unlimited knowing the basis of Rimbaud's abandonment of poetry. The surrealists, too, have been "taken in the trap" of knowledge. They made the additional mistake of confusing the "passivity of inspiration" with "psychic automatism" and regarding the "animal unconscious" as the "unique source of poetry."

Finally, Maritain reconciles, or seems to reconcile, himself (the last three paragraphs of the recent discourse are exceptionally indistinct) to poetry's "descent into the lived-in subject." He proposes as the aim of "poetic knowledge" a primary unconscious deeper than "the Freudian," the "unconscious of spirit *at its source*," (his italics) reached, not through the "inquisitive intelligence," but through "docility," and releasing an element, similar to melody in music, "which is the spirit of poetry." Thus his argument ends by leading the way to something like Eliot's "still point of the turning world," where the "soul" of poetry and its "art" are reunited.

In sum, as Maritain sees it, poetry, which had always been an episode in the history of work, became in the nineteenth century a drama of religious experience.

What evidence supports this curious tale according to which in the age of relative values and hollow men one activity for the first time turns to the absolute, becoming excessively, even impiously, otherworldly? So that the champion of one of the world's great Churches feels called to remind the errant of material conditions.

Maritain's account of the present situation of poetry rests on his craft interpretation of the art of the past and his theory of the dialectical conflict between the "soul" and "body" of poetry ("enthusiasm" or inspiration versus the "work"). "The very career of the word 'poetry'," he begins, "seems to me highly instructive. Only at a comparatively recent time has this word come to designate the *poetry;* previously it signified the *art*, the activity of the working reason, and it is in this sense that Aristotle, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ancients—and our own classical age—dealt with Poetics." (His italics.) The identification of poetry with working reason in former epochs is argued elaborately in *Art et Scolastique.** Once this theory of creation is accepted as the norm of art and the explanation of its most complete accomplishments, modern poetry appears as an aberration arising from excess of spirit and pride. For it is plain that poetry since Baudelaire has called into play other faculties than the "working intelligence," that it has often been unhappily agitated by indefinable energies, and that it has inclined to be aware of itself as different from the rest of man's labors.

But has the profession of poetry always been identical with artisanship?

Even the most obvious records indicate that, among the Greeks, poetry, far from being a practice like that of the artisans, was an inspired calling drawing from streams beyond the individual shaping mind. Plato gives witness of this in the much-quoted passage of the *Ion* on the madness of the poet. Aristotle, too, asserts in his Poetics that "poetry implies a happy gift of nature or *a strain of madness.* In the one case a man can take the mould of any character; in the other, he is lifted out of his proper self." (My italics.) Both "happy gift" and madness bring about that enstrangement of the poet from his own reason, passions, and motives which is called inspiration or enthusiasm, and which is improper to the artisan. Even if we grant Maritain that when Aristotle speaks of the gift of imitation he means a completely sane "*habitus*" developed in connection with a craft tradition, still poetry is not, even with Aristotle, always, that is, as a universal, an "activity of the working reason"; for he says it can also imply

*There we gather from the footnotes and context that "*les anciens*" to whom art was "working reason" were chiefly the scholastics, especially Aquinas, and Aristotle, as interpreted of course by medieval philosophy. Evidently, however, Maritain has become convinced that these writers brought into order the experience of all antiquity, for in the *Kenyon* piece he does not limit the "ancients" to the scholastic tradition, but contrasts the definition of poetry attributed to them with one that arose "only at a comparatively recent time." Thus poetry as "an activity of the working reason" becomes the "Poetics" of the Greeks, the Romans, the medieval and renaissance Europeans, and, with our present conception of antiquity, even of the primitive Babylonian, Egyptian, Semitic, Oriental and other cultures.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a strain of madness. So that it is incorrect to say that Aristotle and the ancients dealt with poetry as a function of practical reason.

Modern research discloses that the "making" of poetry in Greece was throughout an episode of its popular religions, which means that as a profession it followed the course of the social forms of inspiration. After describing the seizures of the priestesses of Apollo and other oracles, Oesterreich in his chapter on voluntary demoniacal possession* continues: "It should be noted that the Greeks themselves gave a wider extension to the term 'possession'. They understood by it all the phenomena of inspiration, particularly of the poetic kind. In the beginning it must surely have been understood in the literal sense when the poet invoked the Muse at the opening of his work: "*Andra moi ennepe mousa—menin aeide, thea*" "*Musa, mihi causas memora*" . . . it is the Muse and not the poet who must sing . . . the poet was convinced that he did not create, but that another, the Muse, did so in his place. . . . Such a conception . . . can only be explained by admitting that the voluntary activity of the creative artist was unconnected with his work and that his most perfect productions were obtained as a gift."

Apparently, the Greek poets knew no conflict between the art, or "body," of poetry and its transports, or "soul." And, in Maritain's terms, their practice involved the following paradox: they could submit completely to the commands of their metier by making themselves mad, that is, by *depriving themselves* of "working reason." The profession was in Greece one of "madness" and as "excessively enthusiastic" as modern poetry is in Maritain's view. This involves no psychological inconsistency, even when we recall the regularity and complexity of Greek versification. The most primitive levels of the mind are, of course, rich in abstract and rhythmical suggestions; on the surface of derangement exceedingly careful measuring, testing, and recasting may take place; and infinite patience is common in these conditions.

By the standard of "working reason," then, Greek poetry, too, was an aberration and too closely linked with "poetic knowledge." "In their [the early Greek writers'] total ignorance of causes," says Symonds, paraphrasing Vico, "they wondered at everything; and their poetry was all divine. . . ." So, too, was Hebrew poetry

*Possession, by T. K. Oesterreich. Richard R. Smith, Inc. 1930.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with its: "The word of the Lord came to him saying, *I . . .*"—formula of the possessed. And among the Chinese the poet has been defined as "one who can endure great quantities of wine."

In the Middle Ages a practical opposition developed between the production of the poem as a visible thing and the creative enthusiasm of the poet. This was due mainly to the persecutions of heretics by the Church. Under the threat of an Inquisition, art (as well as science and philosophy) quickly tends to become a submissive "activity of the working reason." But even under these "material conditions of existence," so intense were the medieval collective beliefs that the arts continued to be penetrated by them and were never entirely assimilated with the crafts. The medieval poet was identified with a community, even though it was a community in a state of suppression. From the popular supernatural magic of Grace, possessing powers of inspiration equivalent, to a very limited extent, to the daemons of the Greeks, painting and the poetic image derived a peculiar physical quality of *light* not available to the working reason. Haloes, beams from heaven, ranked angelic hosts, soft-gold surfaces, inner irradiations, ascending strata of clarity—it is as a Catholic, forgetting the labor of art and proud of the creative "mania" of his creed, that Maritain boasts of the éclat of Christian art: "There is a higher refulgence, that of Grace, which the Greeks did not know." (*Art et Scolastique.*) Whatever may have been the inner condition of the cabinet maker visited by the shining "*habitus,*" his chairs were scarcely the medium for embodying this divine glow.

Hence poetry has not been an "activity of the working reason" in general, but under specific conditions and from the point of view of specific social interests. Could that poet of the Middle Ages participate in the Good Life of the Church who neglected to guard against the rebellious possibilities of the "soul" of the poem? Poetry was indeed then a practical activity carried on in a dangerous relation to spirit. Maritain's theory is an attempt to perpetuate the universals with which the Scholastics generalised the position of the arts in their own time. In so far as modern poetry is also faced with a conflict between inspiration and social practice, medieval theories bear an abstract relevance to it. But the historical content of our dilemma is entirely different and cannot be explained in terms of the contradictions of the Middle Ages—contra-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dictions which, moreover, do not so much express the experience of medieval art as the negative interest taken in it by the Doctors of the Church.

Historically, the norm of the evolution of poetry is its practice as an inspired profession, which in the past could only develop as an episode in the history of religion. This means that to understand the peculiarities of modern poetry we must examine the recent behavior of the profession in relation to those powers by which it was formerly uplifted. Maritain's artisan theory of poetry eliminates from discussion a comparison of the particular influences of the religions and the productive conditions of the past; his idea of poetry's modern turn towards "enthusiasm in a pure state" likewise ignores the particular shape given to poetry by the beliefs, official and popular, of the past century and by its changed methods of work.

Social historians have established that the religious world is created and given intensity by the *conscience** of the community, and that in early societies all professions rely on the supernatural, though not in the same way nor to the same degree.** This collective *conscience* has, however, been dissolving steadily, though irregularly, since the beginnings of recorded history, under the pressure of the progressive division of labor and its complication of social life. By the nineteenth century, with specialization tremendously quickened by scientific method, common sentiments have not indeed vanished, but they have lost their surface clarity, have sunk deeper, and have ceased to emit the well-formed myths of earlier times. In brief, the "supernatural forces" which had made themselves felt in poetry since its origin—these forces themselves have reached in our epoch a crisis, and not one of growth. "The individual feels himself to be," says Durkheim, "he is in

*The French word "conscience," which refers to consciousness as well as to conscience and the moral sentiments, is here intended.

**Everyone knows that prayers used to accompany every undertaking, and success was credited to supernatural favor. But even when all work was thus "inspired," poetic inspiration differed from that of the trades. The aid received by the smith or mariner merely augments a useful minimum resulting from his own skill; while the afflatus of the poet adds to his work not more of the same thing but a special element for which the practice as a whole is valued. Thus poetry is to a greater extent than other professions dependent on the mysteries; and from this very "weakness" comes its prestige in religion-dominated societies, and its human meaning wherever the individual is set into motion from "the outside."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reality, less acted upon ("moins agi"); he becomes to a greater degree a source of spontaneous activity."*

The crisis of the supernatural contains the crisis of poetry—a crisis of its creative energies as well as of its position in society. It, too, is "less acted upon" in the nineteenth century, not more, as in Maritain's soul picture. But the dominant forms of social labor are no longer moved from above at all. Human initiative, aided by science, has become adequate to all the old tasks; and a surplus of power rapidly piles technique upon technique, until every gesture of production is conditioned not by the individual gift of the craftsman but by tools and rhythms arising from other labors and discoveries. The poet's ragged dependence upon the mysteries, far from placing him in the center of the sources of power, now seems to alienate him from them entirely. To the wiping out of the old crafts, poetry had contributed nothing. Measured by what had been achieved and by what was promised for the future—a science for determining the sex of children, a pathology of rejuvenation, mechanical chess players, trips to the moon—poetry appeared at the dawn of the age of inventions as a stupid, feeble, egotistical, and even monstrous survival of darker days. As Cummings was to say a century later, poetry has "to compete" with locomotives and electricity.

As a "profession of inspiration," poetry was thus faced with a practical contradiction. If it held to inspiration in the old manner, it would lag behind the productive organization of society, lack the method of a modern profession, and, deprived of the material and spiritual support of the community, would have to pay itself with divine counterfeits. If, on the other hand, it rejected inspiration and the unknown, it would fall from its age-old pres-

*"If there is one truth that history has placed beyond doubt, it is that religion embraces a smaller and smaller portion of social life. At the beginning, it covers everything; everything social is religious; the two words are synonymous. Little by little, the political, economic and scientific functions free themselves from the religious function, set themselves apart and take on a character more and more openly temporal. God, if one may so express himself, who was at first present in all human relations, progressively withdraws from them; he leaves the world to men and their disputes. At least, if he continues to dominate it, it is from on high and from afar, and the action which he performs, becoming more general and indeterminate, leaves more room for the free play of human forces. The individual feels himself to be, he is in reality, less *acted upon;* he becomes to a greater degree a source of spontaneous activity. In a word, not only does the domain of religion fail to grow at the same pace as that of temporal life and in the same measure, but it increasingly contracts." *De La Division du Travail Social*, by Emile Durkheim. Librairie Félix Alcan, 1911.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tige and have to hire itself out as a petty trade. In either case, it was bound to lose its dynamic existence as a profession indispensable to the collective consciousness.

Poetry reacted to this dilemma in both ways. Part of it attached itself to objects of worship—Nature, the antique, cults of spirit—and gave itself up to quaintness and pictorialism. Another part became an episode in the expansion of work, disciplining itself to provide commodities of entertainment, propaganda, the academy, advertising. These divergent courses of behavior have supplied the poles of the Romantic-Classical debates. Both, however, are passive reactions to the contradiction.

When one speaks of poetry "since Poe and Baudelaire," he does not mean all poetry written after 1830, nor even all the accepted poetry in the Anthologies and Collected Works. What is referred to is a particular unfolding movement or development, which has no periphery but does seem to have a core. It is essentially something new, an "emergent" of the crisis we have been discussing, not merely a passive choice between making and inspiration. The contradiction of poetry in the early nineteenth century was an inner contradiction as well as a practical one, and was thus loaded with creative power. Unlike that of the Middle Ages, it was brought into being by a great historical advance, and it corresponded to a spiritual predicament containing new creative elements. Man had been freed in his work from the social myths, only to find himself dependent upon social relations represented by no visible unifying image. Making lacked inspiration: inspiration lacked content. The poetry called Modern was born out of this contradiction as a thing fresh and unpredictable. Poetry in the line of Poe, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, springing from the tension that split the practice apart, has combined the old elements with cultural materials belonging only to our own time, and has transformed them.

Maritain's doctrine of the self-consciousness of modern poetry, which omits a concrete analysis of the crisis, necessarily misrepresents the direction in which poets have sought its solution.* To the extent that modern poetry is modern, it must be

*It might be of interest to logicians that Maritain's idealistic dialectics sees poetry in general as containing a contradiction of essences: "Faire" vs. "Agir," "activity of the working reason" vs. "the spirit of Beauty." Poetry in his system achieves harmony or synthesis only by a conscious act—in the past, as described in *Art et Scolastique*,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something more than a flight into the desert. "I think," says Maritain, "that what has happened for poetry since Baudelaire has an historical importance equal in the domain of art to that of the greatest epochs of revolution and renewal in physics and astronomy in the domain of science." We agree with Maritain on the revolutionary character of modern poetry. But we cannot attribute this epoch-making importance to a St. Jerome-like escape from literature into meditation. We find its significance rather in the specific professional experiences of those writers who, according to Maritain, "turned away from the poetic work." These experiences, in which the shape of the historical crisis is embedded, group themselves about the following conscious attempts: (1) to master the objective problem of inspiration freed from dependence on religion; (2) to conform the methods of poetry to those of scientific experiment; (3) to rediscover the creative energies of the community. None of these attempts was ever seriously made before our epoch; they are direct responses to it and to it alone; and taken together they are identifying signs of modern poetry.

Poetry and criticism from Poe to the Surrealists is filled with observations and outcries on the profession—to Maritain this is proof of the Narcissism of modern poetry, and all his quotations are taken from such statements. In interpreting them, however, he ignores their intended practical meanings, so stripping them of everything that gives them relevance to life and the color of the real world. Naturally, they then reflect nothing but a black abyss of "spirit" and can be manipulated as evidence of metaphysical concentration upon self. It is as if we took all that has been written on medicine during the past 100 years to prove that the profession has been inhumanly concerned with nothing but the spirit of medicine. Once again, as in his attacks on Descartes, Luther, and Rousseau, Maritain's method is to confront modern thought with the sin of "angelism" (see Maritain's *Trois Réformateurs*) in order to create about it the sense of a void. That this void exists only in

by the "wise" action of the Church; in the future, according to the *Kenyon* article, by poetry's own act of teaching itself to sit still. The historical movement of the past century, that is, modern poetry *as a reality*, is seen as the complete triumph of the antithesis of art, "Agir." From the historical point of view, however, an exactly reversed logic operates: the modern movement *begins* as a synthesis at the very moment when inspiration and making reach, for the first time, an intolerable contradiction. No better indication is needed of the totally idealistic character of the New-Catholic esthetic than its treatment of the actual movement of poetry as inferior to its own logical synthesis.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his own doctrine can be demonstrated by contrasting his interpretation of what the poets have said with their actual meanings.

". . . it is of *itself as poetry* that poetry achieves awareness in him [Baudelaire]," says Maritain (his italics). Three passages are then reproduced to show that Baudelaire had become conscious of poetry as a spirit and that he has contributed to it a "theological quality." The quotations are excellent in themselves, but none points to the profundities intended; on the contrary, each refers to the profession of poetry, its new requirements, its position in society, and its changed relations to the mysteries. "It would be a prodigious thing," Baudelaire noted, "for a critic to turn poet, but it is impossible for a poet not to have the makings of a critic." This to Maritain is soul searching. Why? Because the critic is conscious of poetry, and to Maritain consciousness means concentration on essences. So Baudelaire's statement is automatically translated into "it is impossible for a poet not to have the makings of one who contemplates the self of poetry." But what was Baudelaire actually saying?

As he did so frequently, Baudelaire here repeats an idea held in common with Poe—a poet must understand the means whereby the work is produced, that is, he must be aware of its *law;* he therefore has "the makings of a critic." Even a critic might turn poet if he possessed this knowledge of method. The general tendency of the idea is that the poet can no longer wait for inspiration to provide the poem; he must consciously, *experimentally,** set it into motion. This thought is first sketched in Poe's prefatory letter to his third book of poems, in which he attacks Wordsworth "for wearing away his youth in contemplation" and remarks of Coleridge that "it is lamentable to think that such a mind should be buried in metaphysics." Yet according to Maritain, both Poe and Baudelaire are not only guilty of contemplation and metaphysics but find the poem of no importance in comparison with the state that produces it; they are not makers of poetry but perverse seekers of salvation.

*In his *Marginalia* (XVI) Poe describes "experiments" to "induce" and "control" a condition "compelling heaven into earth," with the "end in view" of "embodying" it in words.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maritain's second quotation, the first stanza of *Benediction*, expresses the disgrace of the profession of poetry in this "tired world." Neither it nor the next specimen, the famous remarks on the correspondence of earth with heaven, contains any hint that Baudelaire felt that "the mysterious knowledge of poetry was *the whirlpool, going along with him.*" (Maritain's italics.) Baudelaire says nothing of poetry "in itself"; he treats it as an instrument "through" which the unknown is glimpsed by the soul *of the reader*, and, most significant, he seeks, like the later pragmatists, to demonstrate the existence of immortality by its subjective or psychological reality, characterising it in scientific language as "a demand of the nerves." No impressionist or Emersonian could have expanded these texts more than Maritain, nor taken less from them.

In Poe and Baudelaire we see already the approach to the synthesis of inspiration and conscious method that was to result in a separate movement in poetry. Poetry would keep its identity as an inspired profession by seeking out the "divine manias" and detaching their processes from the will of the other world. By ceaseless experimentation, it would release the hidden forces from the decaying popular orthodoxies and set them to work at man's command. Poetry would then be no more dependent upon the Muses or upon Grace than travel upon the good will of St. George.

One recalls Poe's challenge of method in *The Philosophy of Composition:* "Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—and ecstatic intuition. . . . It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its [*The Raven's*] composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem."

The intention is obvious—whether or not *The Raven* was actually so composed. Science itself should leap ahead by means of intuition, Poe argues in *Eureka;* poetry, however, must be shaped scientifically. "Inspiration always comes when a man *wishes,*" Baudelaire echoes from across the sea, underlining the volition.

The first analytical step in controlling inspiration was to re-examine all divine images and concepts in terms of their actual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effects on man. Immortality? "A demand of the nerves." Baudelaire made other discoveries: "Prayer is a storehouse of energy." "Of augmenting all the faculties. A cult (Magianism, evocatory sorcery)." "Infinity," says Poe, "like 'God,' 'spirit,' and some other expressions of which the equivalents exist in all languages, is by no means the expression of an idea, but of an effort at one. . . . A word, in fine, was demanded, by means of which one human being might put himself in relation at once with another human being and with a certain *tendency* of the human intellect." (His italics.)

At the very moment, then, when the historical sciences and psychology are beginning to penetrate the old mysteries through systematic research, poetry lays them open through imitation, extracting from them the living powers of mankind covered with myth and abstraction. Believing in nothing, it subjects itself to all deities. Assuming postures of prayer, it notes the results in terms of sensation and vital rhythms. It mimics the trances of the jungle, kneels before painted fetishes, decks itself out as Satan, tattoos itself with the pentagram or Evil Eye—all the time keeping a record more and more exact of its faintings and recurrent floods of strength. These open acts of warfare on religion extend the humanistic struggle against the Church into the farthest provinces of the spirit and on a more radical and deadly level than ever before. While the gross materialism of the nineteenth century simply denies the reality of spirit, thus leaving it intact to reaction, the dialectics of poetry undertakes to deliver its changing gestures into the common vocabulary. " *'We should have to be God ourselves!'* " Poe reflects. "With a phrase so startling as this yet ringing in my ears, I nevertheless venture to demand if this our present ignorance of the Deity is an ignorance to which the soul is *everlastingly* condemned." (His italics.)

This revision of the profession of poetry through the scientific conversion of the ambiguous divine Being into a definable state of consciousness was achieved only through enormous technical labors not accounted for by Maritain's "spiritual reflexivity" with its mystical abandonment of "the line of the work." No modern poet has been able to take existing methods for granted. This lack of "tradition" is another factor that separates modern poetry from artisanship and its norms. With his medieval standards, Maritain hastens to form a "syllogism": no artisanship, therefore no poetic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work; therefore nothing but spirit and the absolute. But the ceaseless discovery of new techniques is the chief characteristic of *modern work,* which has also left artisanship behind. Thus in modern poetry, as in scientific production, making and the penetration of the unknown do not oppose but dynamically advance each other.

In all this, the rediscovery of the community as the source of poetic energy has played a major part. The first *scientific* glance at inspiration disclosed its connection with a community *conscience;* the second, that in modern times the poetic community has become mankind itself. No longer identified with the community through religion and myth, poetry has striven in various ways to establish new relations with it. From Poe's deliberate effort to irritate a special area of sensibility in his audience, and his exploration of dreams, to the fathoming of a collective unconscious by the Surrealists, the line of modern poetic thought is not clear without this search for a *collective subject,* identifying individual inspiration with a wider surging. "I kept steadily in view," says Poe, "the design of rendering the work [*The Raven*] *universally appreciable.*" (His italics.) And it is not to be supposed, he warns, that the states with which he is experimenting "are confined to my individual self—are not, in a word, common to all mankind." "Immense depths of thought," observes Baudelaire, "in popular phrases, hollowed out by generations of ants."

Rimbaud carried to new heights the analysis of how poetry had to work. Deliberate inspiration, scientific conformity of means to end, popular culture—he concentrated these themes into a single novel practice which completely revolutionized the profession.

Everything modern becomes, however, in Maritain's hands an appetite for infinity. "The experience of Rimbaud," he says, "is decisive." Of objectivity? method? synthesis? Not at all. Rimbaud is to stand for mysticism opposing art, for "poetic knowledge" or "enthusiasm" in that "pure state" where "the poetry necessarily enters into conflict with the art," and where "it no longer seeks to create but to know." Did not Rimbaud describe the inspired ego in the formula, "I is another?" Let us forget that this was also the notion of the Greeks (see Oesterreich's phraseology above) and the prophets. To Maritain it is a modern heresy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It means being tempted by the absolute of poetry: "how can we better define this descent into the lived-in subject, which is the poetic knowledge?"

Maritain recurs to the argument that modern art has voluntarily taken too much upon itself. The device for showing this is to characterise poetry with a phrase like "poetic knowledge" and then to treat this as synonymous (consubstantial?) with the "absolute," the "whole of man," the "whole world," "all the treasures of spirit," "absolute life," "the burden of humanity"—a *trompe l'oeil* of concepts that ranks with Dali's multiple images. Having attributed these excessive motives to Rimbaud, Maritain need not condemn his heretical investigations openly from the point of view of the Church but may attack them seemingly in the interests of art itself.

Besides the phrase "I is another," Maritain quotes from the second of the *Lettres du Voyant* in which Rimbaud outlined his scheme of the poet as a "seer." Re-examining these paragraphs, from whose depths so many mystifications have been fished up, we note that they do not deal with "poetry as itself," that is, with what poetry is, or contains, or what it will yield to the poet; they describe what must be done in order to make poems. The letters are "studio notes" or observations on method in poetry, in the same spirit as the notebooks of Da Vinci. Their main aim is to contrast "cultivation of the soul" with reliance on its "natural development," which, says Rimbaud, "takes place in every brain—so many egoists proclaim themselves authors." The epithets applied to this cultivation indicate a technical, even clinical, approach, rather than a metaphysical one: he "who *wishes* to be a poet . . . *looks* into his soul, *examines* it, *tempts* it, *takes hold* of it . . . he *seeks* . . . he *drains* . . . *in order to preserve only the quintessences* . . ." Practices throughout, never essences. Only once does the letter, quoted to show that Rimbaud "has dedicated himself to *knowing*" (Maritain's italics), refer to the intellectual results of this process, and then it declares that the poet "arrives at the *unknown*," he "ends by losing the understanding of his visions." It would be hard to imagine a greater indifference to knowing, or a greater devotion to methodical creation.

Rimbaud had concluded from his studies of antique poetry that the genuine poet did not center his attention on the poem, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the artisan aims at the finished chair, but on the transformation of himself into a maker of poetry. The path to the page was indirect —it led through the caves of Apollo. This detour in search of a *process* of poetic creation is analogous to the scientific way of producing: to make one chair a week, the prolonged *"habitus"* of a craft is needed; a thousand a day are achieved only through the laboratory. Poe and Baudelaire, relying on intelligible method rather than upon the memory of forms, had seen the need for systematic method. They had continued, however, to accept the poet as he was, with his moods, poses, paraphernalia of Beauty. Rimbaud threw all this aside. "Unfortunately," he says, "Baudelaire lived in too artistic a milieu." Poetry must be cleansed of everything belonging to the accidents of a trade or to personal sentiment. Through the force of the "cultivated soul" the poet will force the external world to transform itself into poetic substances. Had it not formerly yielded up gods, angels, devils, and miracles without end?

We need not discuss here the value of this program as a criticism of religion. That Rimbaud's idea of the estrangement of the ego was a practical hypothesis and not a mystical abandonment of art is proved by its success in producing wonderful poems in great quantity for the duration of the test. Maritain is in the position of accepting the results of an experiment while claiming that the experiment tends to make such results impossible.

Like Poe and Baudelaire, Rimbaud, in both theory and practice, takes off from a critical analysis of poetry as a profession. Personal need to decide on a career lends intensity to his judgments. Long before he has conceived his doctrine of the "seer," his poems, letters, conversations, ring with revolt against the métiers open to him. Later, the existing poetry business as a respectable profession becomes the chief object of assault: as the Parnassians professionally scorn the bourgeois, so Rimbaud despises them. This gesture publicly declares poetry to be distinct in social function from other occupations.

The seer himself is shaped directly from judgments on work and creation in existing society. Rimbaud's letter to Izambard in which the plan for "making oneself a poet" is first mentioned begins by ridiculing his former teacher's occupational ethics. Izambard had raised in Rimbaud's mind the conventional argu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment that "one owes oneself to society." "You, yourself," the youth retorts, "belong to the corps of teachers—you roll along in a fine rut." As for him, his job is telling "stupid, filthy and vicious" stories, for which he is "repaid" by his acquaintances with entertainment. This, too, he contends, is serving society. "At bottom you see nothing in your principle [of owing oneself to society] but subjective poetry. . . . Some day, I hope—many others hope the same—I shall see in your principle an objective poetry. I shall see it more sincerely than you will. I shall be a worker. . . . Work now—never, never. I am on strike."

Thus Rimbaud quickly sketches his view that all accepted careers are equally repulsive because they merely satisfy the ego —and places himself at the service of a different conception of work as "objective poetry." In the next paragraph comes the program for realizing the objective idea at once in the profession of poetry. Here first occur the words "I wish to be a poet and work to make myself a seer. . . . It is false to say: I think. One should say: I am thought. Pardon the play on words. I is another." In the inspired act society and the individual are one, but beyond the will or egotism of either.

What is most important about Rimbaud's statement, or restatement, of "I is another" is its affirmation at a given historical moment as a professional creed, a kind of poetic Hippocratic oath, as distinguished from the confession of a mystical celebrant or "knower." Seen in these relations, which include the problem of work, Rimbaud's idea of the poetic identity gives no support to the mystifiers.

I have referred to the style in which the cultivation of the poetic "I" is described. The terms in which Rimbaud evaluates the effects of these rigors are equally non-metaphysical. His verbal standard is positivistic and medical; so that the rôle he is preparing himself for with so much enthusiasm is, in his own definition of it, ironically condemned from the standpoint of society: the soul is to be made "*monstrous*"—it is like "*planting and cultivating warts on one's face*"—the senses are "*deranged*"—"*poisons*"—"*criminal*"—"*accursed*"—"*horrible practitioners.*" No mystic ever used such epithets in naming the ineffable. The image of the new poetic career is seen reflected in the social mirror of his mother and Izambard—he accepts it from them, as it were, with rubber gloves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Consciously continuing the work of Poe and Baudelaire in revolutionizing the making of poetry through the translation of divine into human powers, Rimbaud carries the process into the inevitable problem of the identity of the poet—and halts his speculation at the exact point where the searching and testing intellect can go no farther: the scientific limit. The metaphysician leaps forward to "things," that is, to *words* such as those mentioned by Poe. But to Rimbaud the other "I" is indefinable, ***though it can be affected in precise ways.***

And once again in Rimbaud's "alchemy of the word," modern poetry seeks to link individual inspiration with the creative ferment of the collective mind—its language is to be made of "vieillerie poetique," the folks' own dreaming, unconscious objective poetry, "poetry made by everybody," in the meaning of Lautréamont, that other evil angel of Maritain's dark night.

Rimbaud forsook poetry, Maritain maintains, he "revenged himself" upon it, because of the disparity between its humble capacities as art and its monstrous demands as spirit. The anti-angelic doctor here reaches the crux of his argument: the necessary rejection of art by soul. But how can this be proved by means of a biographical event? What we know of Rimbaud shows that he gave up poetry with unequalled finality, as a scientific pragmatist might reject an aim because the means of realizing it are too costly. It is remarkable how clearly his life in Africa shows that this poet was *not* pursued by poetry, like those to whom it is a spirit, that is, an indefinite urge. It is as if Rimbaud were to such a degree capable of absorbing himself in objective disciplines that he could satisfy himself with, or completely abominate, one practice as another. "I have a horror of all callings," he declares in the opening pages of *Une Saison en Enfers*, returning to his old theme of work. "The hand with the pen is worth as much as the hand with the plough." Poetry, magic sacraments—or money-making, politics, the trades: each to him is a technique. From the East he writes home impatiently for manuals on this or that mechanical process. Like his contemporaries the Russian Nihilist students, who made bombs in their kitchen sinks by following step by step some treatise on explosives, Rimbaud's faith in the efficiency of intellect is unlimited. Theorists who, like Maritain, interpret his career solely as the flight and plunge of a soul neglect

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the support he found in constantly expanding method—to them the Wright brothers would have seemed to be re-enacting the fatal, not to say heretical, error of Icarus.

It was, then, towards a new synthesis of making and inspiration, a synthesis made possible through an alliance with science and the experimental dissolution and re-combination of the living elements of the poetry of the past, that Poe, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud turned modern poetry. This carried them not deeper into poetry (poetry has no depths entirely its own, in Maritain's sense) but abroad into other fields which science was just discovering—psychology, folklore, anthropology, history—and for which its tools have yet to be perfected. Nor would they allow poetry merely to trail after systematic research. "Science," cried Rimbaud, "doesn't go fast enough for us." Having been systematically disciplined, the imagination could go ahead of the sciences into the unknown,* and the accuracy and flexibility of its language was to become the standard of poetry.

It is this deliberateness and consciousness of purpose that chiefly give Maritain pause. "Deliberate undertaking," he notes parenthetically on Rimbaud's letter, "and there already the trap lies hidden." But scientific "cultivation of the soul" is not a trap for poetry. It is rather a snare set by it for the organized religious, which also cultivate souls, but with methods and for purposes of their own. And this trap of poetry is very formidable, for it contains the fatal bait of imitation. As Attic tragedy and comedy, rising out of the popular cults, pushed on their decline by reproducing their myths and ceremonies on the daylight stage, so the experimental self-enstrangements of modern poetry undermine the Church's overseership of that "other 'I' " which has always accompanied the individual. Maritain is well alarmed; it is an invasion of sanctity; and his efforts to halt it are backed by the *Index.*

A significant detail supports the conclusion that it is the

*Poets of artisan or "classicist" tendencies have recently attempted to versify Freudian, Marxian and even Social Credit themes. Such "scientific" poetry, regardless of the radicalism of the ideas expressed, is out of the line of the modern movement as discussed by Maritain or in this essay; since it does not itself bear the mysteries of personality, history or finance but propagandizes for some formula which, presumably, eliminates them. By dedicating itself to social groups or to education in general, poetry joins the other professions and sheds its special problems as well as its deeper intimacy with the community.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"this-wordliness" of modern poetry rather than its excessive spirituality that Maritain is attacking in his inverted image that shows everything upside down: nowhere in the *Kenyon* piece does he mention the Symbolists as belonging to poetry's movement towards self-consciousness and self-liquidation. Yet Symbolism is the one school which his theory might describe. As Valéry stated in "A Foreword," (*Variety*, I) the followers of Mallarmé had "the ambition of definitely isolating poetry from every essence other than its own," and "in the profound and scrupulous worship of all the arts, they thought to have found a discipline, and perhaps a truth, beyond the reach of doubt." This is exactly what Maritain is saying about modern poetry as a whole. Moreover, the decline of Symbolism, according to Valéry, resulted from its inability to "coexist with the conditions of life" and its striving "towards a beauty always more conscious of its genesis." Here, if anywhere, the dialectic of the dark night would seem to have found a corresponding reality of literature. Not a word, however, about Symbolism! Though the Surrealists, who in reaction against Symbolism have gone to extremes to disentangle poetry from itself, are given a special place in Maritain's abyss. Does this omission signify that Maritain's view of modern poetry is itself nothing but Symbolist esthetics criticising itself in the mirror of Aquinas? Or is Symbolism not his enemy, because its inspiration and its aims were derived from literature alone and its investigations restricted to the magic of words? In any case, to criticise modern poetry as if its history were identical with that of Symbolism and to say nothing of Symbolism itself is more than odd.

Actually, Maritain's philosophy is a reaction against those particular interests of modern poetry that give it its novelty and historic importance. To check trespassing upon holy ground, he marks off for poetry the narrow strip of activity bounded by the artisan principle of serviceable making, and advises quiescence and docility to those who have "strayed" outside it. The issue with him is the elimination either of the liberty of the artist or of his daring, at a time when liberty and daring are the sole resources of spirit.

The free artist not only makes but makes as he is "acted upon." Or stated differently, he not only decides *how* to make but is final judge of *what* to make. To Maritain, the term "free artist" is a destructive contradiction. In Footnote 43 of *Art et Scolastique*,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

using a language more blunt than that of his *Kenyon* elegy, he levels the charge of excess of liberty against modern art. For he identifies art with "*Faire*" (to make) and therefore urges that it "submit to command." Freedom he associates with the antithesis of art, "*Agir*" (to act; the principle of moral decision in his system), and this is the business of the artist as man but not as artist.* Therefore the invisible *movements* that reach the poet from society and which cause him to act or to be driven must not be reflected in his art.

Here we "touch the consuming thing crouched in the depths" —not of modern poetry but of M. Maritain. Let poetry resist the vampire of inspiration so that it may resist the force and consciousness of the changing *conscience* of society. Let it learn to sit still in the dark night and put its "inquisitive intelligence" to sleep.

"It is necessary," said Rimbaud in the concluding paragraphs of *Une Saison*—"it is necessary to be absolutely modern. No canticles: hold the position gained." In the poetry of the past century, it is possible to speak of *progress*—not, of course, in the sense of improvement from year to year, but with respect to the accumulation and perfecting of instruments at the disposal of the spirit "absolutely modern." This progress can be illustrated by segregating in the work of Poe and, to a lesser extent, Baudelaire all the left-overs which they could not exclude if they were to speak at all. Or from the opposite end of the time-segment by trying to imagine the composition of *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* without the verbal charges of this hundred years. Every poet truly modern has increased the capacity of the human spirit to live and realize itself in its time. When Maritain recalls against modernism its individual casualties, he tempts us to draw an awesome contrast: on the one side, the handful of pioneers of the "dark night" who left indestructible blazes for those who follow; on the other, the thousands who "deranged their senses" and "drained every poison" in the caves and deserts of the Dark Ages but without the intention of or the technique for gathering and handing on what each had gained. Whatever is done for the poem by the poet,

*There is an ironic parallel between this Catholic view of the artist and that of the Communist Party and other political organizations. If the artist will submit his work to control, those above him in decision will take charge of his liberation as a human being. Wonderful mockery of both art and freedom!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

professional humanizer of the mysteries, is done for all; whatever was done for salvation by the saint was done for one, and was therefore at the mercy of an organization.

Modern poetry has no frontiers which it is forbidden to cross. It is serious about all former miracles, including that of Grace; since Grace too is a human condition and can therefore be understood and perhaps ultimately be produced at will. The direction of poetry has been set by a faith peculiar to this age: that man will become the center of powers which, were he to sense them within him today, would cause him to tremble before his own greatness, as Rimbaud trembled before the aspect of his seer.

CONTRIBUTORS

KARL KORSCH, author of *Marxismus und Philosophie, Karl Marx,* and other books, lives in Boston. . . . IGNAZIO SILONE is still living in Zurich, Switzerland. His new novel, *The Seed Beneath the Snow,* has just been published. . . . JULIAN SYMONS is an English poet and critic. . . . VICTOR SERGE, novelist and historian, is well-known to our readers. He is now living in Mexico City. . . . HAROLD ROSENBERG, who has fresuently contributed to PARTISAN REVIEW, will shortly publish a book of poems. . . . D. S. SAVAGE, an old contributor to PARTISAN REVIEW, is one of the younger English poets. . . . GEORGE WOODCOCK is the editor of the English magazine, *Now.* . . . ALEX COMFORT is a young English poet. . . . F. O. MATTHIESSEN is a member of the English Department of Harvard University. His study of Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson and other classic American writers, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman,* was published last year. . . . GERTRUDE BUCKMAN is a young writer who lives in Cambridge, Mass. . . . H. J. KAPLAN, a critic whose work we have published before, lives in Chicago. . . . C. WRIGHT MILLS is a member of the Department of Sociology of the University of Maryland and has contributed to *Ethics, The Journal of Sociology, The New Leader,* and other publications. . . . J. R. STANWELL is working on a study of war economics. He lives in New York City. . . . HARVEY BREIT, a young poet and critic, whose work has appeared in PARTISAN REVIEW, *Poetry, The New Republic,* and elsewhere, lives in New York City.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pacifism and the War

A Controversy. By D. S. Savage, George Woodcock, Alex Comfort, George Orwell.

D. S. Savage:

A few brief comments on George Orwell's March-April *London Letter*.

It is fashionable nowadays to equate Fascism with Germany. We must fight Fascism, therefore we must fight Germany. Thus Mr. Orwell, "the greater part of the very young intelligentsia . . . don't feel the horror of Fascism that we who are somewhat older feel," also, "there is no real answer to the charge that pacifism is objectively pro-Fascist." *Answer:* Fascism is not a force confined to any one nation. We can just as soon get it here as anywhere else. The characteristic markings of Fascism are, curtailment of individual and minority liberties; abolition of private life and private values and substitution of State life and public values (patriotism); external imposition of discipline (militarism); prevalence of mass-values and mass-mentality; falsification of intellectual activity under State pressure. These are all tendencies of present-day Britain. The pacifist opposes every one of these, and might therefore be called the *only genuine* opponent of Fascism.

Don't let us be misled by *names*. Fascism is quite capable of calling itself Democracy or even Socialism. It's the reality under the name that matters. War demands totalitarian organization of society. Germany organized herself on that basis prior to embarking on war. Britain now finds herself compelled to take the same measures after involvement in war. Germans call it National Socialism. We call it Democracy. The result is the same.

Let us assume that Mr. Orwell means "objectively pro-German." (If so, his loose terminology is surely indicative of very loose thinking.) Who is "objective"?—Mr. Orwell, a partisan of one particular side in the struggle? According to this type of reasoning, a German or Japanese pacifist would be "objectively pro-British." This is puerile. Mr. Orwell is assuming that the pacifist shares his chauvinistic predilections. On the contrary, we regard the war as a disaster to humanity. Who is to say that a British victory will be less disastrous than a German one? The last British victory was pretty meaningless.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Orwell, in all his recent writings on the subject, shows a total inability to grasp the real nature of pacifism. Let me try, in a few words, to enlighten him.

Mr. Orwell is himself a "politician," with a politician's outlook on things. He consequently sees pacifism primarily as a political phenomenon. That is just what it isn't. Primarily it is a moral phenomenon. Political movements are based on programme and organization. With pacifism, programme and organization are quite subsidiary. Pacifism springs from conscience—i.e., from within the individual human being. "*Peace News*," says Orwell, "follows its old tradition of opposing war for different and incompatible reasons." There are certainly innumerable reasons why war should be opposed, but the chief reason is the diabolical nature of modern warfare, with its diabolical repercussions upon human personality and values. I am not referring only to the act of warfare itself, but the whole complex of events which is war. The corruption and hollowness revealed in the prosecution of this war are too contemptible for words. Certainly I will accept my share of responsibility for them, but I won't fight in a war to *extend* that corruption and hollowness.

Perhaps I ought to try and give expression to what many of us pacifists feel about Germany in relation to ourselves, since Mr. Orwell brings up this point. Needless to say, we have no love for Fascism, and our entire attitude is one of personal resistance to all forms of Fascism, as they impinge upon us in concrete form. (Whereas Orwell swallows the concrete encroachments and waves his arms at a distant bogey.) Not only will we not fight, nor lend a hand with the war, but the "intellectuals" among us would scorn to mentally compromise themselves with the Government. Orwell dislikes the French intellectuals licking up Hitler's crumbs, but what's the difference between them and our intellectuals who are licking up Churchill's? However: we "don't believe in any 'defence of democracy,' are inclined to prefer Germany to Britain, and don't feel the horror of Fascism that we who are somewhat older feel." I can only speak for myself, of course, but surely the 'defence of democracy' is best served by defending one's own concrete liberties, not by equating democracy with Britain, and allowing all democracy to be destroyed in order that we may fight better—for "Britain"; and Orwell should not need to be told what, or who, "Britain" now is.

I am not greatly taken in by Britain's "democracy," particularly as it is gradually vanishing under the pressure of the war. Certainly I would never fight and kill for such a phantasm. I do not greatly admire the part "my country" has played in world events. I consider that spiritually Britain has lost all meaning; she once stood for something, perhaps, but who can pretend that the *idea* of "Britain" now counts for anything in the world? This is not cynicism. I feel identified with my country in a deep sense, and want her to regain her meaning, her soul, if that be possible: but the unloading of a billion tons of bombs on Germany won't help this forward an inch. The pretence exists in some quarters that, although Britain has been a sick nation, now, engaged in war, she has "found her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

soul," and by this one gathers that the sickness was exemplified by Chamberlain and the soul-finding by Churchill. Unfortunately, deep changes do not occur so easily as that. England does not even know what she is fighting for, only what she is fighting against. The pacifists' "championing" of Hitler referred to by Orwell is simply a recognition by us that Hitler and Germany contain a real historical dynamic, whereas we do not. Whereas the rest of the nation is content with calling down obloquy on Hitler's head, we regard this as superficial. Hitler requires, not condemnation, but understanding. This does not mean that we like, or defend him. Personally I do not care for Hitler. He is, however, "realler" than Chamberlain, Churchill, Cripps, etc., in that he is the vehicle of raw historical forces, whereas they are stuffed dummies, waxwork figures, living in unreality. We do not desire a German "victory"; we would not lift a finger to help either Britain or Germany to "win"; but there would be a profound justice, I feel, however terrible, in a German victory. (In actuality, any ruler would find us rather awkward customers, one no less than another.)

Now, how about Mr. Orwell's own position, and the position of people like him? I would ask him to consider, first, the company he keeps. Who are his leaders? What is the actual social system which he is fighting to defend? What hopes has he of diverting the stream of history the way *he* wants it to go? Brave words and muddled thinking cannot disguise the fact that Mr. Orwell, like all the other supporters of the war, shipping magnates, coal owners, proletarians, university professors, Sunday journalists, Trade Union leaders, Church dignitaries, scoundrels and honest men, is being swept along by history, not directing it. Like them, he will be deposited, along with other detritus, where history decides, not where he thinks. Mr. Orwell is, I believe, a man of integrity, an honest man. But that does not make up for his superficiality. And can we afford superficiality, at any time, still less times like these?

May 11, 1942

DRY DRAYTON, ENGLAND

George Woodcock:

I hope you will allow me to comment in your columns on certain references in George Orwell's London Letter to the review *Now*, of which I am editor.

Orwell suggests that this paper has a Fascist tendency, and names two of its contributors, Hugh Ross Williamson and the Duke of Bedford, to prove his case. In fact, *Now* was established early in the war as a review for publishing literary matter and also as a forum for controversial writing which could not readily find publication under wartime conditions. Not all the writers were opposed to the war, and of the fifty odd contributors to the seven numbers only two, those named by Orwell, were even reputed to have Fascist tendencies. Neither of these men contributed more than one article to the review. The remaining writers included

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anarchists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, pacifists and New Statesman moderates. Julian Huxley and Herbert Read, two of its best-known contributors, can hardly be accused of Fascism!

The reference to the article by Julian Symons is, in my opinion, unjust. Orwell gives no idea of its subject and does not quote a single sentence to prove his assertion that it is "vaguely Fascist"! No one in England, except Orwell and possibly the Stalinists, would think of suggesting that Julian Symons has any Fascist tendencies. On the contrary, he has been consistently anti-Fascist, and the article mentioned, which attacks *Now's* former lack of a definite political line, is Marxist in tendency.

I do not propose to defend Hugh Ross Williamson or the Duke of Bedford—although I would mention that neither of them belonged to the B.U.F. and that the People's Party, although it may have contained former Fascists, was not a Fascist party and contained many honest pacifists and socialists, like Ben Green, whose wrongful imprisonment and maltreatment in gaol caused a major scandal. I would also point out that if we are to expose antecedents, Orwell himself does not come off very well. Comrade Orwell, the former police official of British Imperialism (from which the Fascists learnt all they know) in those regions of the Far East where the sun at last sets for ever on the bedraggled Union Jack! Comrade Orwell, former fellow traveller of the pacifists and regular contributor to the pacifist *Adelphi*—which he now attacks! Comrade Orwell, former extreme Left-Winger, I.L.P. partisan and defender of anarchists (see *Homage to Catalonia*)! And now Comrade Orwell who returns to his old imperialist allegiances and works at the B.B.C., conducting British propaganda to fox the Indian masses! It would seem that Orwell himself shows to a surprising degree the overlapping of left-wing, pacifist and reactionary tendencies of which he accuses others!

Adverting to *Now*, I would mention that this review has abandoned its position as an independent forum, and has now become the cultural review of the British anarchist movement. Perhaps Mr. Orwell will regard this as another proof of his mystic and blimpish trinity.

Finally, I would point out two inaccuracies in Orwell's letter. The anarchist pamphlet to which he refers is entitled "The Russian Myth," and the editor of the *Adelphi* during the earlier part of the war was not John Middleton Murry, but the late Max Plowman.

May 19, 1942
RICHMOND, ENGLAND

Alex Comfort:

I see that Mr. Orwell is intellectual-hunting again, in your pages this time, and that he has made the discovery that almost every writer under thirty in this country has his feet already on the slippery slope to Fascism, or at least to compromise. It seems I am a "pure pacifist of the other-cheek" variety, a piece of horticultural eulogy I'm glad I did not miss, and that I deserve a spanking for associating with such disreputables as the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Duke of Bedford and the—perfectly harmless—Ross Williamson. The trouble is that some of your American readers may not realise Mr. Orwell's status in this country and take his commentary seriously. We all like him here, though the standard of his pamphleteering is going down of late, and we know him as the preacher of a doctrine of Physical Courage as an Asset to the left wing intellectual, and so forth. I think we all agree that he is pretty thoroughly out of touch with any writing under thirty years of age, and his last two public performances—a reproof in sorrow to my book "No Such Liberty," and this "London Letter" of his—suggest that he still has not grasped why most of the post-Thirties poets are pacifists, or what their pacifism would entail if Hitler arrived here.

Mr. Orwell calls us "objectively pro-fascist." I suppose he means that we are letting anti-fascism go by default. If we suggest to him that we, who have the single intention of salvaging English artistic culture when the crash comes, are the only people likely to continue to hold genuinely anti-fascist values, he will not be convinced. But perhaps he will grant that Hitler's greatest and irretrievable victory over here was when he persuaded the English people that the only way to lick Fascism was to imitate it. He puts us in a dilemma which cannot be practically rebutted, only broken away from—"If I win, you have political fascism victorious: if you want to beat me, you must assimilate as much of its philosophy as you can, so that I am bound to win either way." Accordingly we began feverishly jamming into our national life all the minor pieces of Fascist practise which did not include socialist methods, sitting on the Press "because this is Total War," making our soldiers jab blood bladders while loudspeakers howl propaganda at them, because the German army consisted of efficient yahoos. The only people who said that to defeat Fascism one must (a) try to understand it and (b) refuse to accept its tenets oneself were the pacifists. It looks as if Mr. Orwell and his warlike friends were being not objectively but constructively supporters of the entire philosophical apparatus which they quite genuinely detest.

What, again, does Mr. Orwell imagine the role of the artist should be in occupied territory? He should protest with all his force, where and when he can, against such evils as he sees—but can he do this more usefully by temporarily accepting the status quo, or by skirmishing in Epping Forest with a pocket full of hand grenades? I think that English writers honour, and will follow when the opportunity comes, the example of integrity which Gide has set. We are going to be entrusted with the job of saving what remains of the structure of civilized values from Hitler or alternatively from Churchill and his bladder-prickers. The men who, like Orwell, could have helped, are calling us Fascists and presumably dancing round the ruins of Munster Cathedral. We prefer not to join them, and if, in the pursuit of our task we find ourselves obliged to publish in the same paper as the Devil himself, the others having politely refused us as unorthodox, we shall have very few qualms.

May 18, 1942

BRENTWOOD, ENGLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George Orwell:

Since I don't suppose you want to fill an entire number of PR with squalid controversies imported from across the Atlantic, I will lump together the various letters you have sent on to me (from Messrs. Savage, Woodcock and Comfort), as the central issue in all of them is the same. But I must afterwards deal separately with some points of fact raised in various of the letters.

Pacifism. Pacifism is objectively pro-Fascist. This is elementary common sense. If you hamper the war-effort of one side you automatically help that of the other. Nor is there any real way of remaining outside such a war as the present one. In practice, "he that is not with me is against me." The idea that you can somehow remain aloof from and superior to the struggle, while living on food which British sailors have to risk their lives to bring you, is a bourgeois illusion bred of money and security. Mr. Savage remarks that "according to this type of reasoning, a German or Japanese pacifist would be 'objectively pro-British'." But of course he would be! That is why pacifist activities are not permitted in those countries (in both of them the penalty is, or can be, beheading) while both the Germans and the Japanese do all they can to encourage the spread of pacifism in British and American territories. The Germans even run a spurious "freedom" station which serves out pacifist propaganda indistinguishable from that of the PPU. They would stimulate pacifism in Russia as well if they could, but in that case they have tougher babies to deal with. In so far as it takes effect at all, pacifist propaganda can only be effective *against* those countries where a certain amount of freedom of speech is still permitted; in other words it is helpful to totalitarianism.

I am not interested in pacifism as a "moral phenomenon." If Mr. Savage and others imagine that one can somehow "overcome" the German army by lying on one's back, let them go on imagining it, but let them also wonder occasionally whether this is not an illusion due to security, too much money and a simple ignorance of the way in which things actually happen. As an ex-Indian civil servant, it always makes me shout with laughter to hear, for instance, Gandhi named as an example of the success of non-violence. As long as twenty years ago it was cynically admitted in Anglo-Indian circles that Gandhi was very useful to the British government. So he will be to the Japanese if they get there. Despotic governments can stand "moral force" till the cows come home; what they fear is physical force. But though not much interested in the "theory" of pacifism, I *am* interested in the psychological processes by which pacifists who have started out with an alleged horror of violence end up with a marked tendency to be fascinated by the success and power of Nazism. Even pacifists who wouldn't own to any such fascination are beginning to claim that a Nazi victory is desirable in itself. In the letter you sent on to me, Mr. Comfort considers that an artist in occupied territory ought to "protest against such evils as he sees," but considers that this is best done by "temporarily accepting the status quo" (like Déat or Bergery, for instance?) A few weeks back he was hoping for a Nazi victory because of the stimulating effect it would have upon the Arts:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"As far as I can see, no therapy short of complete military defeat has any chance of re-establishing the common stability of literature and of the man in the street. One can imagine the greater the adversity the greater the sudden realization of a stream of imaginative work, and the greater the sudden katharsis of poetry, from the isolated interpretation of war as calamity to the realization of the imaginative and actual tragedy of Man. When we have access again to the literature of the war years in France, Poland and Czechoslovakia, I am confident that that is what we shall find." (From a letter to *Horizon*.)

I pass over the money-sheltered ignorance capable of believing that literary life is still going on in, for instance, Poland, and remark merely that statements like this justify me in saying that our English pacifists are tending towards active pro-Fascism. But I don't particularly object to that. What I object to is the intellectual cowardice of people who are objectively and to some extent emotionally pro-Fascist, but who don't care to say so and take refuge behind the formula "I am just as anti-Fascist as anyone, but—." The result of this is that so-called peace propaganda is just as dishonest and intellectually disgusting as war propaganda. Like war propaganda, it concentrates on putting forward a "case," obscuring the opponent's point of view and avoiding awkward questions. The line normally followed is "Those who fight against Fascism go Fascist themselves." In order to evade the quite obvious objections that can be raised to this, the following propaganda-tricks are used:

1. The Fascising processes occurring in Britain as a result of war are systematically exaggerated.

2. The actual record of Fascism, especially its pre-war history, is ignored or pooh-poohed as "propaganda." Discussion of what the world would actually be like if the Axis dominated it is evaded.

3. Those who want to struggle against Fascism are accused of being wholehearted defenders of capitalist "democracy." The fact that the rich everywhere tend to be pro-Fascist and the working class are nearly always anti-Fascist is hushed-up.

4. It is tacitly pretended that the war is only between Britain and Germany. Mention of Russia and China, and their fate if Fascism is permitted to win, is avoided. (You won't find one word about Russia or China in the three letters you sent to me.)

Now as to one or two points of fact which I must deal with if your correspondents' letters are to be printed in full.

My past and present. Mr. Woodcock tries to discredit me by saying that (a) I once served in the Indian Imperial Police, (b) I have written articles for the *Adelphi* and was mixed up with the Trotskyists in Spain, and (c) that I am at the BBC "conducting British propaganda to fox the Indian masses." With regard to (a), it is quite true that I served five years in the Indian Police. It is also true that I gave up that job, partly because it didn't suit me but mainly because I would not any longer be a servant of imperialism. I am against imperialism because I know something about it from the inside. The whole history of this is to be found in my writings, including a novel which I think I can claim was a kind of prophecy of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what happened this year in Burma. (b) Of course I have written for the *Adelphi*. Why not? I once wrote an article for a vegetarian paper. Does that make me a vegetarian? I was associated with the Trotskyists in Spain. It was chance that I was serving in the POUM militia and not another, and I largely disagreed with the POUM "line" and told its leaders so freely, but when they were afterwards accused of pro-Fascist activities I defended them as best I could. How does this contradict my present anti-Hitler attitude? It is news to me that Trotskyists are either pacifists or pro-Fascists. (c) Does Mr. Woodcock really know what kind of stuff I put out in the Indian broadcasts? He does not—though I would be quite glad to tell him about it. He is careful not to mention what other people are associated with these Indian broadcasts. One for instance is Herbert Read, whom he mentions with approval. Others are T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, Reginald Reynolds, Stephen Spender, J. B. S. Haldane, Tom Wintringham. Most of our broadcasters are Indian leftwing intellectuals, from Liberals to Trotskyists, some of them bitterly anti-British. They don't do it to "fox the Indian masses" but because they know what a Fascist victory would mean to the chances of India's independence. Why not try to find out what I am doing before accusing my good faith?

"*Mr. Orwell is intellectual-hunting again*" (Mr. Comfort). I have never attacked "the intellectuals" or "the intelligentsia" en bloc. I have used a lot of ink and done myself a lot of harm by attacking the successive literary cliques which have infested this country, not because they were intellectuals but precisely because they were *not* what I mean by true intellectuals. The life of a clique is about five years and I have been writing long enough to see three of them come and two go—the Catholic gang, the Stalinist gang, and the present Pacifist or, as they are sometimes nicknamed, Fascifist gang. My case against all of them is that they write mentally dishonest propaganda and degrade literary criticism to mutual arse-licking. But even within these various schools I would differentiate between individuals. I would never think of coupling Christopher Dawson with Arnold Lunn, or Malraux with Palme Dutt, or Max Plowman with the Duke of Bedford. And even the work of one individual can exist at very different levels. For instance Mr. Comfort himself wrote one poem I value greatly ("The Atoll in the Mind"), and I wish he would write more of them instead of lifeless propaganda tracts dressed up as novels. But this letter he has chosen to send you is a different matter. Instead of answering what I have said he tries to prejudice an audience to whom I am little known by a misrepresentation of my general line and sneers about my "status" in England. (A writer isn't judged by his "status," he is judged by his work.) That is on a par with "peace" propaganda which has to avoid mention of Hitler's invasion of Russia, and it is not what I mean by intellectual honesty. It is just because I do take the function of the intelligentsia seriously that I don't like the sneers, libels, parrot phrases and financially profitable back-scratching which flourish in our English literary world, and perhaps in yours also.

July 12, 1942
LONDON, ENGLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

OLD METHODS — NEW HORIZONS

The Wind Blew From The East: A Study in the Orientation of American Culture. By Ferner Nuhn. Harpers. $3.

Writers In Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars. By Maxwell Geismar. Houghton Mifflin. $3.

In this case the publishers' blurbs are relevant. Van Wyck Brooks pronounces Nuhn a writer of "real vision," while Edmund Wilson gives his approval to Geismar. This makes an appropriate alignment, since *The Wind Blew from the East* is a kind of corn-fed *America's Coming of Age*, and *Writers in Crisis* uses a method certainly learned in part from *The Triple Thinkers*. It will be as instances of critical method and its application that these two books chiefly command our interest, as ambitious efforts to re-orient and extend our living tradition.

Nuhn's study is the first installment of a projected trilogy. His leading assumption is that "our main tradition is not 'romantic,' in any useful meaning of the word," that Franklin and Jefferson, Emerson and Whitman, Twain and Garland and the later Middle Western novelists, have all been "realistic" in their assimilation of experience. But these writers are not his subject here. He has reserved them for another volume, as he has also the treatment of the "tragic strand" in our literature. Here he has concentrated on "our minor 'aristocratic tradition'," more specifically on Henry James, Henry Adams, and Eliot, more generally on speculations of "how to accommodate in our tradition the Atlantic Ocean!" He gives the first full-length literary account of a phenomenon which our historians have often noted, the so-called back-track movement. While our economic pioneers were driving ever more rapidly westward throughout the nineteenth century, our cultural curent was often drawn eastward. We can note this as early as Washington Irving and Longfellow, though the pilgrimages became more frequent after the Civil War. Howells and then Garland went reverently from the Middle West to Boston, while James was just leaving Boston for Europe and leading the way in turn for Eliot and the post-war expatriates of 1919. Nuhn's mode of symbolizing this phenomenon is suggested by his chapter-title, "East Wind—Western Star," and a characteristic instance of his evocative style reveals his thesis: "West for work and money, back East for ease and grace. West for profanity, East for piety. West for action, East for status. West for function, East for ornament. West for democratic color, East for aristocratic form. That is what the East Wind says."

When he descends to particulars, Nuhn's work is very uneven. He makes the most extended application of his variegated thesis to James, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seems betrayed by his dichotomizing when he goes to the length of saying that for this novelist "Europe is form without spirit, America spirit without form." There are so many instances in which that vague contrast would not hold that it is more profitable to consider Nuhn's handling of *The Golden Bowl*, the one work of James to which he devotes a detailed scrutiny. In dealing with "the enchanted kingdom" of Maggie Verver, he bears down hard upon the fairy-tale "make-believe ending," and, to bring out the unreal element in the glowing aura of Maggie's love, he writes a brilliantly ingenious passage on how the story might have been told from Charlotte Stant's point of view. That story would have brought to the surface realms of the unconscious which James did not probe, and by revealing aspects of unrecognized sexual pathology in the overly close relations of Maggie and her father, it might well have ended by turning "the lovely princess" into "the bad witch."

It is too bad that Nuhn did not provide more such specific analyses, since his wider generalizations about James are often dubious. He is considerably less adequate on Adams, for here he intrudes the fallacy which has so frequently distorted modern criticism: that the man "is more important than his work." In the case of an intellectual like Adams such a proposition is preposterous, inasmuch as the only relevant image we can have of him is that which his writings provide. Nuhn further restricts the value of this chapter by the device of substituting the part for the whole, by concentrating upon—and overreading—the poem to the Virgin of Chartres, as though it was Adams' central performance. He thereby symbolizes the main issue of Adams' life as a choice "between the Mothers and the Fathers." The masterly *History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* is hardly more than mentioned, though this work alone would greatly modify the conception of Adams' dependence upon Europe.

The most interesting point in the chapter on Eliot is Nuhn's contention that *The Waste Land* "is not tragic," that it amounts to being one of the long series of poetic "descents into hell," but that there is no proper tragic resolution and release. This might raise the absorbing question of why so many American writers have possessed a tragic sense without having been able to write full tragedy, of why our frequent structure has been an engulfing descent into the maelstrom, even in the case of *Moby Dick*. Nuhn almost entirely disqualifies himself as a commentator upon such questions by another lapse in method, the most serious with which his pages can be charged. He proceeds on the naive basis that since a symbolist poem yields different levels of meaning, it is fair game to find in it anything you choose. Consequently he reads into Eliot's lines every stray association of his own. The dog-star means the ascendancy of naturalism or democracy, the "fiery points" of the hair of the society woman in "The Game of Chess" suggest the nimbus of the Goddess of Liberty, Stetson might "on a chance" be Pound and the one-eyed merchant Joyce, while the Elizabethan bird-call "jug jug" connotes "inspiration out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jugs, or perhaps the jugular vein severed . . . !" These details are only the beginning of the private poem which Nuhn substitutes for the original. He is even less disciplined in handling Eliot's later work where he forces any line from its context to prove what he will about the poet's retreat into faith.

If I have insisted upon Nuhn's defects and have not given due credit to his range of "stimulating" and "challenging" ideas, it is because I believe it our duty now to be on guard against the modes of thought inaugurated in our criticism by Nuhn's master. *America's Coming of Age* was salutary in making us aware of the insufficiency of our cultural past; but by the time Brooks had reached middle age and was dissatisfied with his own earlier dissatisfaction, he substituted a quite different image. He sentimentalized our past and then went on to give a warped and mean-spirited view of our present. Nuhn is obviously a man of good intentions, with a more catholic and full-blooded taste than Brooks. But his method is wholly irresponsible. If we are to have adequate cultural history, we must begin by respecting the texts themselves. Nuhn's free-hand renderings finally obliterate all essential distinctions even between Emerson and Dante, so that he doesn't grasp why Eliot should have felt it an issue to turn from Unitarianism to Catholicism. For Nuhn, or for any critic who so hypostatizes ideas, both "visions" are equal.

The greater value of Geismar's book consists in the fact that he has hewed much closer to the pattern of what his authors have said. He has set himself explicitly to a study "of the changing beliefs of the contemporary American novelist in our period of social crisis." The solid foreground of his attention is occupied with the complete works to date of Lardner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Wolfe, and Steinbeck. He examines these writers singly and in their relations with one another. He is particularly incisive, for instance, in showing what a similar verdict is pronounced upon the disintegrating millionaires' world of the twenties by Lardner's stories and by *To Have and Have Not.* He notes again how both Hemingway and Dos Passos were attracted to Spain for the pleasure, vitality, and dignity of its life, but with the contrast that *Death in the Afternoon* in 1932 was "talking of the matador," whereas *Rosinante* in 1922 was "already discussing the masses."

The limitations of Geismar's straightforward method are much simpler to pin down than Nuhn's. The most damaging one can be stated in the proposition that ideas are not novels. He says that "ours is a particularly interesting time to study art," but he hardly makes that study in any strict sense. As is sometimes the case with Wilson, he tends to take each novelist's form too much for granted and to range about in his content. The result is particularly apparent with Lardner. Geismar provides much the most thorough treatment yet in print of the implications of his frustrated satire, but sometimes, by taking Lardner's statements straight, he neglects the conventions of frozen-faced humor in which Lardner was dealing, and makes him seem serious in the wrong sense. Again Geismar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is impressed with Wolfe's development, but he seems to assess it too much in Wolfe's own assertions, not enough through the evidence—the only cogent evidence—of a created work of art. And the vexed question of to what degree Faulkner is a writer with a genuine vision of social decadence rather than a synthetic Dostoevsky cannot be settled by the easy assumption that he is "equal to any technic." His technic must be scrutinized, his devices seen in their component parts, his diction and rhythms alertly listened to, if we are to judge whether his effects are genuine or manipulated.

The chapter which shows Geismar's real strength within his limitations is naturally that on Dos Passos, since Dos Passos as a conscious social critic presents of all the group the most significant range of intellectual development. By considering everything the novelist has written, Geismar demonstrates how utterly the early Dos Passos hero, the aesthetic young man, was dissociated from American life. So too with this hero's creator: his concern with revolution in the post-war world was conditioned almost exclusively by European models—witness how much he seems to have learned, at the very start of his career, from the Spanish radical novelist Pío Baroja. In consequence of his lack of any living contact with the American past, a lack widely felt in his immediate generation, Dos Passos in his trilogy often seemed to equate democracy with finance capitalism, and to ignore our own revolutionary tradition. This restricted view caused him, as Geismar notes, to miss entirely the tragic significance of Woodrow Wilson at the climax of *1919*, to see in him not the defeated hero of the older liberalism with his *hamartia* of pride, but a mere hollow gesturer, a marionette with his poppies at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

As evidence of Dos Passos' more recent growth, Geismar cites *The Ground We Stand On,* and though he does not exaggerate the value of that amateur history of the era from Roger Williams to Jefferson, he seems to press its implications for Dos Passos' re-orientation pretty far. He finds that, as a result of that study, the novelist now seems to be on the verge "of his own big American critique." But the ground we stand on is no longer the brightly lighted terrain of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and any effectual human freedom must obviously be won through the control of far more complex economic forces than our revolutionary fathers had to face.

It is to such complex forces that both Nuhn and Geismar devote their final chapters, and thus most clearly indicate the date-line at which their critiques have been shaped. Geismar would seem to be in substantial agreement with Nuhn's statement that "There is a new idea in the world, effective common choice in economic as well as political rule." In his concern that our individualism should no longer be distorted into "the superiority of one individual over another," Geismar attempts to chart the most fertile lines of development for our social novel. He has by no means escaped the fashionable jargon of our journalistic criticism, which in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creasingly tends to categorize our literature in terms of rigid decades. Indeed, Geismar carries to its ludicrous extreme the tendency to regard the year '29 as a wall of fire separating the thirties from a Gomorrah given over entirely to "rising stocks and rising skirts." In so hypostatizing a decade and writing about it in a pastiche lingo imitated from Dos Passos' Newsreels, Geismar adds his own chapter to the willful oversimplification of our past. For he quite neglects that on the creative level with which he is dealing, the twenties were not primarily the realm of American Can and Can and Peaches Browning, but the period when more good poets were writing at their maturity than during any other decade in our history, and when the American theater first took on international stature. Fortunately Geismar does not indulge in the latest form of romanticism, now current in the liberal weeklies, where the view prevails that the next monolithic barrier is '39, and that since change is king, the one thing sure about the literature of the present decade is that it must have nothing in common with that of the last.

Both Nuhn and Geismar, in so far as he looks forward rather than back, are more serious critics than that. Both are occupied with our cultural continuity. They have further in common that both end up discussing our social structure. They are symptomatic of current politics in that though both seem committed to some form of socialism, they reject Marxist toughness. They both affirm their hopes with enheartening passion, even though Geismar sometimes breaks into merely excited rhetoric and Nuhn into folksy pep-talk. They are both finally vague on how the transformation to their new societies is to be implemented. Nuhn doesn't get much more specific than that we must act through our tradition of "good faith" rather than by compulsion. Geismar comes somewhat closer to social actuality by conjecturing that the popularity of *The Grapes of Wrath* might conceivably indicate that the United States will accomplish its sweeping economic changes "as a new sort of popular fashion." Both these writers bring new horizons to our criticism, though neither has mastered a method, and both write with the eloquence of innocence.

F. O. MATTHIESSEN

A SLUM ON THE WAY TO THE END OF THE NIGHT

Never Come Morning. By Nelson Algren. Harper. $2.50

Poverty and degradation have existed in Chicago for a long time. We have been told so by many authors of the thirties. In *Never Come Morning* we find the inhabitants of this great American city in the darkness of a now familiar abyss, accentuated and illuminated only by electric lights, once more unaware of how they came to be there, or what they should do to get out, if they ever go so far as to realize the peculiar insulation of their crevasse. These people live in the shadow of society as they live in the shadow of the 'El.' But when the 'El' is torn down, they will not come forth to a better life. Events of a violent and shocking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nature occur; but to the protagonists nothing happens which does not take on the flat taste of everyday living. Their speech and their actions are full of an easy brutality and a casual viciousness that spring naturally from a social group whose moral tone is completely diseased. Algren proposes no remedies; he just barely sketches the disadvantages of such a background, and indicates, in passing, the futility and helplessness of such relief agencies as society makes available.

Bruno Bicek, the ball-playing, pugilist hero, may be said to be a more sympathetic character than his companions only because he is young, confused and weak. He dreams of triumphs in the ring and on the diamond, he adheres to his group's standards, and he fears its members. Hence he hands over his girl to half the hoodlums in the neighborhood, for a monstrous line-up rape, during which, bewildered and sickened by his half-understood betrayal, he commits murder. The girl is eased into a brothel; the boy gets a moral blow from which he does not recover; everything else goes on as before, except that the two persons with a taint of bourgeois imagination have been rendered helpless, one by justice, the other by violence.

Apart from making his heroine a Christian and resigned character, Algren spares us any leavening glimpses into a life more wholesome and gentle. This is not to say that he is not maudlin. He is. His brothel scenes are painfully sentimental, and Mama Tomek, the head of this dubious household, is a character distilled from pure corn. The reader thinks of Reba in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, and of her richly humorous house. How the whole rendition sparkles in comparison with this! This account may be as authentic but it is neither as convincing nor as interesting, and because of the damage it does, in its present form, to the structure of the novel as a whole, it should have been left out, or rewritten with some of the cunning and economy which Algren manages for the greater part of this book. His pageant of prostitutes, in which each girl conveniently retells the story of her fall, and his pageants of jailbirds, which gives us a neat cross section of the criminal types of a large city, share the same fault of interrupting the drive of the narrative. They are excresences. Algren seems to regard them as cadenzas, but curiously enough, it is in these sections that his true virtuosity fails him.

The episode in which the hero is questioned in jail was a good story when it appeared in *The Southern Review*. It is even better here, in the frame of the novel. There is good, clear, unencumbered writing all through. Algren is, in general, a very sharp observer. The atmosphere penetrates one's consciousness and recurs with surprising force because of the powerful and sensitive description. Altogether, language is handled with a feeling for style; the speech rhythms are effective, and the Polish turns of phrase ring true. The slang is sometimes obtrusive, as in the moving pictures: "Or maybe the barber would get him a fight with some head-shy boogie . . . and he'd ice the jig with a punch." Sometimes his hand with symbols is a little heavy, and when Bicek, on his way to seduce

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the girl, notices the sign on her mother's gate as he slips upstairs: BE AWARE OF THE DOG; sometimes his irony is a little blatant, as when, leaving her, after this touching scene, he says to himself: "I'll make it up to her. I'll take her to Riverview," Riverview being the Coney Island of Chicago.

But one cannot so easily quote the good writing, which is textural and dramatic. Algren does not, I think, achieve either the consistent irony of Brecht in *A Penny for the Poor,* or the revealing cynicism of Celine in *Journey to the End of the Night.* These authors have a point of view informed by significant ideas and by a width of perception which nothing in Algren suggests. Both Brecht and Celine have a vision of the forces of evil which comes closer to their ultimate causes and is thus more terrifying because of the unmistakable implication of universal guilt. But Algren is, in any case, a better writer than this book is a novel, and one can only hope he will extend his range of insight and tighten his form.

GERTRUDE BUCKMAN

CONFOUND THE WISEGUY

Confound the Wise. By Nicolas Calas. Arrow Editions. $3.50.

Nicolas Calas is a young Greek poet who, a few years ago, confounded the French with his *Foyers d'Incendie.* Now, in New York, he brings forth a book which to the superficial reader would seem to be about Poetry, Portuguese baroque, Sadism (In Praise of) and the general business of being a desperate character in these distracted times. But "viewed from a subjective angle" (I am quoting from the Introduction) "*Confound the Wise* is a series of essays on intention in art." This exalted young man is strangely enamoured of the Führer-prinzip; his theory of intention is really a programmatic statement which may be gathered into the word *Command!* The first poem, he tells us, was the "pure sexual cry" of man in search of his mate. "Language itself would not exist if it did not express the wish to command which is the prerequisite to the act of conquering." Hence the denunciation of Ahden, who has addressed himself to reminiscence and regret. Calas ends one chapter on a Rimbaldian chant:

A savior is needed
He shall be a poet!

The subjective angle is useful, for without it one can make no unity of this disorderly, erudite, brilliant and (by reason of its constant and mechanized brilliance) extremely boring book. Thus the whole absurd attack on memory, which has the effect of a vigorous refutation of the moon, is to be understood pragmatically: Stop trying to remember! You were a fool to forget in the first place! And thus science ("experience can prove only what we want it to prove"), art ("art in literature has nearly always been linked with the effort more than with the result"), the past ("Let us probe history with every instrument that exaltation can bring us. . . . History is true only when it is poetic!")—all become functions of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

desire. And lest it be objected that there is no need to probe history, provided we have a sufficiently poetic imagination, I hasten to add that Mr. Calas is also a professed and determined materialist-marxist-monist. He is like one of those readers of *Towards an Understanding of Karl Marx* who, only a few years ago, were intoxicated by the notion that they might make the past come true—if only in the approved textbooks of the Commissariat of Education; and if we win the future what other textbooks will there be?

The genial and patient American reader may, in all modesty, be confounded, but he cannot help thinking that Mr. Calas has made a tactical mistake. For if a work of art, like the past, means what we want it to mean, and if successful art is a function, not of achievement, but of intention, *i.e.* of what the poet *commands*, then obviously the reader is expected to want what the artist wants. For every sadist must there not be at least one masochist? "When man does not know what he wants," says Calas, "it's just as well that someone should want in his place. Liberty is for those who know what they want." But what if we anti-poets maintain our own intentions? This conspirator preaches rebellion, and yet he really wants *us* to obey!

But it would be unfair to suggest that a large part of *Confound the Wise* is devoted to the study of intention. For the most part the poet forgets what he intended in order to study whatever comes to mind. He has a passion for all those studies and problems and tasks which are "imposed upon us" by the solutions or failures of the (as recent as possible) past. His book has seven pages of bibliographical notes; and he is constantly reminding us that since Freud or Einstein or Whitehead, Nothing is the Same Anymore. "In times of non-Euclidean geometry and of relativity it is necessary to reeducate ourselves in all fields, and not only does the quantum theory require if it is to be properly understood men of a new mentality, but the Mendelian theory also . . . obliges us to adopt a revolutionary conception of time and space." This would seem to be obligation enough for one small volume, but alas, "Today our knowledge of dreams is comparable to Euclid's cognizance of geometry and one of our tasks now shall be to discover the non-Euclidean age." Or again (Patience! said Panurge): "It is one of the *tasks* of literature to describe the anxiety felt by the loss of the image. . . . Chamisse has succeeded with his Peter Schlemihl to make us feel the gravity of this *problem*." (my italics)

I cite these passages, not in the spirit of irritation which they engendered, but simply to prepare a point I shall make about the attitude of Calas and the surrealists to the values—science, history, revolution—which they are concerned to defend. *Confound the Wise* is frankly presented in the "spirit of the church." It would be interesting to examine the progress we have made between the Euclidean Nicolas (of Cusa)—who also set out to confound the wise—and this embattled and non-Euclidean Greek. But Calas is more closely related to another, more militant, church. "Surrealism," he tells us, "fights with passion and obstinacy all those who, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our troubled days, either try to stain the purity of poetry or try to confuse the issues in man's struggle for freedom by reintroducing into esthetics such malodorous terms as apocalyptic or mystic poetry." The statement, in itself, is execrable, but what concerns me at the moment is the fact that Calas ends his Introduction with a quotation from St. John of the Cross, "a great poet of darkness, of a darkness filled with the light of inspiration only vast synthetic concepts of the world can shed." Shall we conclude that Calas is entirely irresponsible? Of course. But the matter goes further. This poet is a mystic to end all mystics; and when he tells us that "poetic action has to be directed against all metaphysical conceptions of life," we are doubtless expected to understand his book—and Surrealism in general —as one more ideology to end all the rest.

The advance-guard movement in France has frequently and curiously combined a revolutionary spirit with certain millenial or otherwordly *mystiques* (often centering about an inflation of the role of art itself). It was a "social" period which saw the birth of the advance-guard, and there were many artists on the barricades when Louis-Philippe lost his throne. But the poets (see Flaubert) were "betrayed," and increasingly thereafter they turned their insurgence to art—a world they could control—and to a renewal of those analogical speculations which had worked through the Romantic underground to Baudelaire, and which were found to be able, as efficiently as opium, to induce chiliastic dreams in latter-day poets. (Note the case of Rimbaud who sought *power* through poetry.) Now, as we emerge from the "social" thirties, there has been a new birth of Surrealism with all its attendant revelations in New York. The apostles are here, and it is pertinent to ask why. Simply to help us cross the *pons asinorum* from the proletarian revolution to the unconscious one?

To what end have they banded together? "We live in a scientific age," says Mr. Calas, "and only reactionary forces are ready to accept Wagner and Claudel and to turn against science." Presumably it is the surrealist's "monism" which makes him suppose that the "acceptance" of Wagner or Claudel must imply a rejection of science. It was Dewey's "monumental error" to consider art an experience, whereas every child in the *petite chapelle* knows that it is an "infernal machine." But just as this most literary of characters professes the most complete disinterest in form ("what really counts is what has been said and not how it is said")—so the super-scientist, intoxicated by theories that may not outlast the decade, is profoundly opposed to that *method* of problem-solving which is science's humble and enduring contribution to our intellectual life. Witness his distrust of psychoanalysis itself—when used as a medical technique rather than a source of incantations. Witness such word-juggling as, "Experience can never prove the error of a theory; only facts can be false, and experience may, when repeated in the same conditions, fail again, and it is for others to discover the proper conditions in which an experiment may succeed." Obviously, an experiment is defined by its conditions, which depend in turn upon theory (*i.e.* upon what we are trying to prove). This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is what permits us to say that an experiment succeeds or fails, that a theory is verified or disproved. In his paradoxical course, Calas confuses the most elementary distinctions. And to what end? Simply to assure the "obedience" of masochistic fact to the "command" of sadistic intention? It is much more than that. *Calas and his cohorts are out to destroy the entire world.*

I make this assertion in all seriousness, and I am not merely referring to the reduction of reality to a function of sadistic desire. Mr. Calas is not against everything; nor do I take literally his threat to "flood the world with our poems." I am speaking, rather, of that concert of ego-projection which, in literature, has been the most ominous product of the *petite chapelle.* By the world I mean here, to borrow the poetic definition of a modern logician, "everything that is the case." Unfortunately most of the propositions which thus compose the world, even our non-Euclidean one, are so banal as to make a stench in the nostrils of the Romantic Rebel. This personage, whose vested interest is his individuality, is therefore inalterably opposed to everything that is the case! Having transferred his rebellion to the realm of the Word, he firmly and courageously pursues what he calls his "insight"—truth being allowed to fall where it may. The important thing is *to have ideas;* and since it is discussion which reveals those time-worn ideational structures upon which all originality is based, far better to *command* one's ideas than to discuss them. Marx stood Hegel on his head—Calas sets him right again; democracy, he tells us, "is after all but a regime in which discussion and explanation drown inspiration." . . . Is it not difficult, in this light, to understand the surrealist animus against technique? Surely Calas must know that some very effective techniques have been developed, in our scientific age, whereby "inspiration" is able to silence discussion?

But let us not ascribe to literature the gravity, or the frivolity, which it assumes in the *petite chapelle.* The enormity of Mr. Calas' intention is equaled only by the inconsequence of its results. Let him destroy the world! The genial and patient American reader, who loves banality and longs for an academy, will build it all up again.

And now that Calas has bared his darkest plot, I am compelled to confess that I have not done justice to his book. There are, after all, the chapters on the baroque, the amusing "envoi" to New York, the curious spiritualized descriptions of Portuguese things and places, all interwoven with omens, subtle humor and sociological pattern-work. But, alas, there is also the story of "Iphigenia," the little Portuguese girl who lost both her legs in an automobile accident. Calas suggests that this child may yet know love, in fact might supply some surrealist with an interesting mistress. *Patience,* said Panurge. "The Portuguese must get over their fear of blood, and develop their roads so that car accidents will increase the number of their Iphigenias." On this unhappy bravado our patience ends. Confound the wiseguy!

H. J. KAPLAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LOCATING THE ENEMY

1. *The Nazi Behemoth Dissected*

Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism. By Franz Neumann. Oxford Press. $4.00.

I: Franz Neumann's book is at once a definitive analysis of the German Reich and a basic contribution to the social sciences. No book could be both these things and not contain poltical directives. In looking closely at one complex object, Neumann reveals in sensitive outline many features of all modern social structure. He has that knack of generalized description that describes more than its immediate object; and he sees many things in that object, Germany since 1918, as "the specific working out of a general trend." To lift his style of analysis above the mere depictive and into understanding he pauses in a concrete potrayal to present a typology of possibilities. For example, of the relations of a state to a party in any one-party system, of kinds of imperialism, of the relations between banking and industrial capital, or of political patterns *vis-à-vis* the Reich and the various sections of her empire. Almost a third of Neumann's sentences are comparatively informed, and when he uses history, as in the reweaving of the rope of charismatic legitimations, he always comes up to face the day before yesterday now more clearly understood.

When events move very fast and possible worlds swing around them, something happens to the quality of thinking. Some men repeat formulae; some men become reporters. To time observation with thought so as to mate a decent level of abstraction with crucial happenings is a difficult problem. Its solution lies in the *using* of intellectual residues of social-history, not jettisoning them except in precise confrontation with events.

Franz Neumann's book represents the best tradition of the social sciences in Germany, which came to full stature during the Twenties. He looks down a neo-Marxist slant further subtilized by Max Weber's distinctions and deepened by a sociologically oriented psychiatry. His thinking is thus sensitively geared to great structural shifts and to happenings in the human mind.

Such reporting as his book accomplishes is of central facts tied down by the best documentation available. And there is no repeating of formulae in it: Marx may bear a Nineteenth Century trademark in some matters, but, as Neumann again makes clear by a fresh intellectual act, the technique, the elements, and the drive of his thinking is more than ever relevant, and right now. There are so many who have "forgotten" what they once half understood and who take the easy ways out that it is downright refreshing to experience a book which displays a really analytic heritage with perception and with craftsmanship.

II: Neumann's Germany is a type of capitalism; he calls it "totalitarian monopolistic capitalism." Those who would deny this characterization are forced by Neumann's study (a) to do some tall (and narrow) defining of "capitalism" which can be justified against his careful usage

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the term, and/or (b) to deny the thoroughly documented and, it seems to me, determining facts which Neumann has drawn together concerning the operation of the basic institutions of capitalism in Germany.

One of the generic errors of those who do not see the German economy as capitalistic is Marx's view that capitalism is an anarchy of production. Of course, as Max Weber contended, modern Western capitalism is nothing of the sort. It is rationalized and planned. The more monopolization continues, the more capitalism is controlled and planned. "States" have interfered less in the mechanisms of *laissez-faire* than have monopoly capitalists. Many of those who would deny the advantages of capitalism to Germany do so within a definition of pre-Twentieth Century capitalism. However much this may help along the pleasant attitudes held of capitalism in other countries, it is not fair to the capitalists of Germany. They are not so old-fashioned as those who talk about their demise. And they are not so unhistorical.

To define "capitalism" as consisting of the "free competition" of a large number of independent entrepreneurs with freedom of contract and trade is, of course, to speak of the past. A more enduring trait, and therefore one better fitted to be seized upon in a definition, is the major institution of modern society: private property in the means of production. Now rapid technological change, requiring heavy investments, further augments the gobbling up of the little by the big and this monopolization eventuates in an extremely rigid economic structure. Powerful corporations demand guarantees and subsidies from the state. Thus, in an era of monopolization "the administrative act" and not "the contract" becomes "the auxillary guarantee of property." Intervention becomes central, and: "who is to interfere and on whose behalf becomes the most important question for modern society." In Germany, as seen by Neumann, National Socialism has tied the economic organization into the web of "industrial combinations run by the industrial magnates." By means of the newer implementation of property, the administrative command, the cartellization of German business has proceeded rapidly. The Nazis saved the cartel system, whose rigidities were sorely beset by the depression. Since then their policies have consistently resulted in a further monopolization into the orbit of the big corporations. The cartels and the political authority have been welded together in such a way that private hands perform such crucial politico-economic tasks as the allocation of raw materials.

But who runs the giant cartels? Behind cartellization there has occurred a centralizing trend which has left power decisions and profits in the lap of the industrial magnates, realized many an old dream not shared by the now regimented workers or the small business men now virtually eliminated. The dreams come true in Germany may well be those of the industrial condottiere everywhere. Among specific Nazi politics which have implemented ths olgarchification of capitalism is Aryanization: Jewish property expropriated has not gone to the "State," but to industrialists

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such as Otto Wolff and Mannesmann. (Apart from the Jewish case, there is a definite trend away from any thought of genuine nationalization.) The power of such industrial combines has also been augmented by the "Germanization" of business in conquered territories. The "Continental Oil Corporation" of Berlin is predominantly composed of the most important German banks and oil corporations. Heavy industry in Lorraine was equitably distributed—among 5 German combines. More important than these processes has been the industrial revolution in chemistry, subsidized by the State, but deriving its dynamic from capitalism, and rendering power to giant combines in the same way that all property in the means of production confers power, but more brutally. The hard outlines of the cartel powers are further confirmed by the near assimilation of finance capital by the monopolists of industrial capital.

Neumann has shown that profit motives hold the economic machinery of the Reich together. But given its present monopoly form, capitalism demands the stabilizing support of a total political power. Having full access to and grip upon such power is the distinctive advantage of German capitalism. Profits in a situation of great demand and with plant expansion improving the competitive position and thereby profits—this is the motivating force of the set-up. Gottfried Feder is quite dead. Those who, in the face of Neumann's documentation, would accept Feder's "anti-capitalist" mumbling as a true characteristization of Germany have many facts to deny.

And they must give an explanation of her belated imperialist war: Any thesis about Germany which does not explain her adventurous role in the war is inadequate. Such explanation cannot be performed by modern curse words (outmoded psychiatry), nor by the finger smugly pointed at bad gangs out for "power," nor by reference to the merely formal growth of "bureaucraciies." It requires attention to the economic structure and its political apparatus that lead dynamically into war. Neumann has not resolved this problem with the subtlety which he undoubtedly commands, but the type of characterization he offers of Germany seems to me the only one so far available which not only allows an explanation but which already has the job three-quarters done. Germany's expansion is the result of the dynamics of a younger monopolized capitalism in a world situation where trade and investments can only be conquered by political means. Neumann has established in detail that this imperialism is primarily the policy of industrial leadership and the outcome of the internal antagonisms of the Germany capitalist economy. "It is the aggressive, imperalist, expansionist spirit of German big business unhampered by consideration for small competitors, for the middle classes, free from control by the banks, delivered from the pressure of trade unions, which is the motivating force of the economic system." This does not mean, however, that every element in Germany is a "tool" of industrial magnates.

III: For the problem of elites is not identical with that of the socio-economic structure, however much the two are linked in a going concern. There are 4 elite elements dominating Germany today. Monopoly of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means of production and of the means of violence sustain them. And each of them has its bureaucracy. Power lies within and between these 4 groups. All influential decisions must be understood with primary reference to them; all propaganda is to be understood in terms of their needs to control, conjure, and mask the attentions of the ruled classes from the consequences of their decisions. Power in Germany is deposited with monopoly capitalists, especially in the heavily industrial sectors; the Nazi Party; the state bureaucracy; and the armed forces.

These are the rulers and the rest are the ruled, but these form at times an uneasy front, and the ruled may well be watching carefully. From these 4 angles, interests, anchored in the entire social structure but especially in violence and production, coalesce into the central aim: continual preparation and maintenance of imperialist war. To grasp this clearly is to see the structure of the regime as a total thing, called Behemoth.

War gives National Socialism not only glory but a stabilization of its power; to industry it gives profits, conquers foreign markets and accumulates booty capital. Neumann sees the bureaucracy, relatively unchanged by the Nazi conquest of power, marching with the victorious. This may be doubtful, but certainly the army has gotten "everything it wanted." In the trade policy, as well as in war, if we may so distinguish, the political and economic elites see eye to eye. Here there is an identity of interests and aims among the divisions of the ruling class. The Nazi elite have further consolidated themselves, as have managers, by climbing *via* political power into the ownership of heavy industry. The Herman Goering Works, which might well make capitalists everywhere envious, is the grandiose example of this process. "Political power without . . . a solid place in industrial production is precarious." Thus do economic men die. The Nazis used the knowledge and ruthlessness possessed by big industry; big industry used the anti-democracy, anti-unionism, and violence of the Nazis. They are not too unhappy together.

In contrast with the profits and the self-manned organizations of business, labor's wages are near-stabilized, and it has no organizations of its own. From 1932-1938 wages and salaries rose 66%, whereas "other income" rose 146%; at the same time production nearly doubled. Neumann's experience with labor organizations in Germany make his detailed statement of the conditions of labor and of labor policy definitive. The labor market is authoritatively controlled to the limit of human recalcitrance. The working class is regimented and fragmentalized in order to prevent any common basis for movements, and the individual workman is isolated and terrorized. The "interference" of the party and the "State in "economics" has again helped old dreams to come true. Not only has the prevailing class structure been accepted; in the process of the ruling elites' consolidation, it has been riveted and clinched from the upper side.

The army with its close ties to industrial and agrarian capital would seem to be a further bulwark against any attempt of the party or state to move against capitalism. Profits for capitalists, prestiged positions in the army for their sons; power and prestige for the army—these elements

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coincide as the system runs into war. Himmler, the party in general, has by no means succeeded in gaining jurisdiction over the army. The uneasy and often indefinite balance of power between the 4 elites is counterbalanced by the antagonisms which beset the system and lend to the elites a total fear of the working class. Again the analysis is pointed to explain war.

IV: Just as the basic outline of the political and economic structure is teased out from the legal and doctrinal verbiage, so are the ideologies of the regime explained in terms of the composition and developmental trends of the social structure and its various strata. Ideologies and social structure are seen conjointly, which is the only way to see either in accurate and telling focus. For in some situations nothing that is said can be taken at its face value, and it is more important to know meanings than to test for truth. Indeed, the way to political reality is *through* ideological analysis. This is the way that Neumann has taken, and this is why his account of Nazi ideology is at times definitive and always interesting. His account of the blending of geopolitics and international law to form a "Germanic Monroe Doctrine" is a model for such analysis. If this particular style of imputation is intellectually too brutal, it stands in fortunate contrast to Rauschnigg, de Sales, Vierick, and others who have not controlled their understanding of Nazi proclamations, ideas, and policies by careful reference to their anchorages in the evolving features of the political-economic structure.

Ideas are political cloaks. The ideology of *Gemeinschaft*, *e.g.*, masks the impersonality of a rationalized society. Those academic sociologists who in American silos yearn from a "primary-group" society, take note: Jefferson died in 1826. As human relations become impersonal by virtue of bureaucratic intervention, the ideologies of "community" and of "leadership" have been imposed. In a similar contradiction Neumann shows that as the political power of the state has increased, the doctrine of the totalitarian state has been rejected by Nazi intellectuals.

Anti-Semitism has its economic functions which work conjointly with propagandic uses: it aids monopolization by distributing spoils to industrial capitalists whose support is vital, it diverts the discontent of small Aryan businessmen, and attempts to satisfy the anti-capitalist feeling of those areas of the masses who want wholesale expropriation. Thus, anti-Semitism operates as a surrogate for class struggle by heaping hatred upon one "enemy"; in the same act it seeks to "unify" the Aryan community.

The manner in which Nazi doctrine is shaped by the need to ensnare various strata is neatly illustrated by its inclusion of perverted Marxist elements. "Proletarian racism" stands as a strategical surrogate for "proletariat"; nationalist war against capitalism, for "class struggle"; "peoples community," for "classless society," and so on. Thus has the Marxist May Day become a national holiday.

Neumann's style of imputation systematically accomplishes 2 objectives: it makes possible a controlled understanding of doctrinal formula-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions by referring them to poltical crises and social structure; and it enables an ingenious *use* of *changes* in ideology in detecting which strata of the population was not ensnared by the previous line. The Nazi line has changed frequently.

V: The analysis of Behemoth casts light upon capitalism in democracies. To the most important task of political analysis Neumann has contributed: if you read his book thoroughly, you see the harsh outlines of possible futures close around you. With leftwing thought confused and split and dribbling trivialities, he locates the enemy with a 500 watt glare. And Nazi is only one of his names.

Not only does acceptance or rejection of Neumann's analysis set the type of understanding we have of Germany, it sets our attitude toward given elements in other countries, sights the act of our allegiance, places limits upon our political aspirations: helps us locate the enemy all over the world. That is why Franz Neumann's book is not only the most important to appear about Germany; it is a live contribution to all leftwing thinking today. His book will move all of us into deeper levels of analysis and strategy. It had better. Behemoth is everywhere united.

C. WRIGHT MILLS

2. *Something New on the New Order*

The Structure of the Nazi Economy. By Maxine Y. Sweezy. Harvard University Press. $3.00.

This is a nice book to have around when people start to tell you why Germany is A New Economic Order. That is to say, it is an especially nice book for PR readers to have around. For, Lord knows, the readers of this magazine have had to face the question: Is it Capitalism? Bureaucratic Collectivism? Managerialism? Statism? A Vampire Economy? And they have not been too plentifully supplied with materials for checking the answer.

That is where Mrs. Sweezy's book may help. Its specific virtue consists in the systematic and detailed quantitative analysis of official German statistics. Altogether a rather unique and excellent job. In working with the data Mrs. Sweezy shows a technical competence in empirical economic research which for the most part has been absent from the recent discussions on the subject. She treats the relationship of government to business, the behavior of transportation, foreign trade, labor and agriculture, corporations, cartels, the price structure, fiscal policies, and the distribution of the national income. I should judge that the most illuminating section is the one on corporate profits.

Some of the more interesting results may be summarised. 1) There has been no trend toward government ownership. The trend which was noticed rather early in the career of the Nazis towards "reprivatisation" has *not* been reversed. Government intervention has increased, but not to the extent sometimes claimed, and the increase itself has amounted in many cases merely to giving official sanction to the "self-administration"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of business bodies somewhat like our own chambers of commerce; in other cases it has consisted largely in an official guarantee (in the form of aid in fixed asset expansion, amortisation allowances, etc.) of the safety of investments; and in still others it is a matter of party people acquiring business interests. 2) Prices have risen, but are not out of hand. An index of wholesale prices constructed by Mrs. Sweezy shows an increase of a little more than 10% from 1933 to 1938. (The official German index, which is less accurate, shows a much larger increase.) 3) The price of labor has been kept at depression level. 4) On the other hand the average profit for all corporate industry has recovered, and indeed compares very favorably with the slightly higher profits of the preceding prosperity of the twenties. This relationship continues to hold if deductions are made for corporation taxes. By the use of a very large sample (covering over 90% of total corporate capital), Mrs. Sweezy is able to demonstrate in particular (a) that the average profit ratio for German corporations of all industrial types rose from the all-time low of a net loss of 10.6% in 1931 to a positive ratio of 6% in 1937. This ratio fell off very slightly in 1938. Positive profits appeared for the first time in 1933. (b) If one goes behind this average to the industrial groups which are its components, one finds that the recovery in heavy industry under Hitler far exceeds the peak profits of the twenties. Profits in luxury goods industries, while they have recovered from the low of —17.6% in 1931 to about +2% in 1937, have never achieved again the level of prosperity of the twenties. Mrs. Sweezy presents similar details for many breakdowns of the aggregate corporate profits. In short, the picture resembles closely the usual cyclical fluctuations in profits that we expect in a society governed by the profit motive. The most striking individual trait within this pattern is the relative strengthening in position of the heavy industrialists. 5) There has been a continuation in the growth of centralisation and concentration of capital. 6) The method of financing the war program has been surprisingly conservative. Nazi fiscal policy is not what one would expect from the miraculous accounts given by the New Order theorists. A very considerable proportion of the public expenditure has been financed through taxation. 7) Inequality of income as well as of wealth has increased measurably.

The German economy, then, seen under Mrs. Sweezy's glass, looks very much like the familiar business economies of the present day under war-time conditions. Business is good. All a business man needs in order to sell his product and increase his capital is to produce: There has been a huge expansion of the market.

What bearing does Mrs. Sweezy's study have on the current debate on the question: Is Germany a new social order? It provides material, certainly, for checking the answers. But the question is unclear. The bearing therefore is obscure only insofar as the debate itself is shifting and footless. Those who find Germany to be a New Order have made their point scholastically. They define capitalism in an arbitrary way; they assert

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the German economy does not fulfill the requirements of their definition; they conclude that Germany is therefore free from the ills which they suppose capitalism to be heir to. The first and last steps in their argument have been especially sketchy. The empirical demonstration that German fascism does not meet the requirements of their several definitions is the part of their argument that was impressive. Burnham's evidence, however, consists in mere assertion with a tone of scientific authority. For example, what he has to say about the sad plight of German profits is patently falsified by Mrs. Sweezy's computations. The most familiar form of evidence cited is the case of individual capitalists who have been ousted and individual party people who have become powerful. However, it now appears that this rearrangement has been greatly exaggerated; its significance would in any case be unclear.

A lot of business men have become politicians. And a lot of politicians have become business men. Does this have any more than biographical interest? Is it merely a change in the personnel of German capitalism? Is there any fundamental conflict of interest between these two groups? The people who have used this change in the relative fortunes of "the politicians" and "the economic men" (I use quotes because it is clear that the distinction is getting harder and harder to make) have assessed its significance on the basis of an inadequately formulated theory of the relation of politics to economics. Politics, *Fortune* magazine tells us, has superseded economics. Its view seems to be that the economic laws have been suspended by political edict. (Like a veto of the law of gravitation.) And similarly MacDonald states: "The State can solve its economic difficulties—so far as these are caused by the workings of capitalist factors—by almost any means it chooses, including, if necessary, a proclamation by the Fuhrer that the moon is made of green cheese, followed by a decree of the Four Year Plan Authority that all banks and corporations must subscribe a certain percentage of their capital to finance the Hermann Goering Cheese Works to exploit lunar food resources." I would be interested in seeing an analysis of the workings of the Goering Green Cheese Works, and of the form of society whose economic difficulties are solved on this model.

In reviewing Burnham's book, the editor of *Business Week* complained that "the author never gets around to detailing how his managerial society will work." I have a similar complaint about the writings of all the theorists of the New Economic Order. Though these men have been discussing the structure of an economy, they have been extremely forbearing in the use of any economic analysis. Indeed, I am not convinced that they have the secret of the workings of the *old* order. And this lack turns out to be crucial, for to prove that the Nazi economy is not subject to the recurrent crises of capitalism, these men have to link the first and last steps of their argument. They must show that the characteristics which they find lacking in Germany are the characteristics which bring about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crises in our society. But, strangely enough, this theoretical part of their argument remains to be worked out.*

Mrs. Sweezy's own study is no great shakes theoretically. Her theoretical comments are meager, and the few scraps do not fit together very well. Thus she seesaws between the statement that the final end of the German economy is war (pp. 4, 50, 123, 233, 235) and the conclusion that this war itself is a means to expansion and the continuation of profits (p. 24). She phrases her results generally in Keynesian jargon (marginal efficiency, liquidity preference, propensity to consume, etc.), but none of the Keynesian hypotheses figure in the investigation. The book's virtue, however, is, as I have said, its careful collation of official materials and its measurement of German economic behavior.

Yet this careful empiricism is a virtue sufficient to cut the ground from under the feet of the theorists of the New Order. For they stirred excitement, not because of the clarity or deductive elaborateness of their theoretical constructions; they caused a stir because of the sensational factual statements which they offered in evidence. These empirical statements, it is now clear, were either one-sided or just plain false. And they were offered in support of an economic theory which was never made explicit. But before continuing to argue the newness of the New Order, it would be good to know its order. The only thing left its exponents is to try to make sense of their theory, to offer a coherent political economy, an analysis of what makes things tick in the new order as distinct from in the old. To do this would be to lift the level of discussion considerably above that of words and slogans. Otherwise we can go on matching similarities and differences and definitions for another ten years.

J. R. STANWELL

WITH THE LITTLE MAGS

VVV—Rm. 3308, 10 East 40th St., N. Y. C. 4 times yr. $4.
DYN—Apartado Postal No. 3, Coyoacan, Mexico, D.F. 6 times yr. $5.
VIEW—360 E. 55th St., N. Y. C. 4 times yr. $1.00.
KENYON REVIEW—Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio. 4 times yr. $2.00.
ACCENT—Box 102, University Station, Urbana, Illinois. 4 times yr. $1.00.
ANTIOCH REVIEW—Yellow Springs, Ohio. 4 times yr. $2.00.
HORIZON—6 Selwyn House, Lansdowne Terrace, London, W. C. 1. Monthly. 6 month subscription—$2.00.
MODERN MUSIC—113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C. 4 times yr. 50c copy.
RETORT—Box 7, Bearsville, N. Y. 4 times a year. $1.00 yr.
TOWNSMAN—West Mill, Morwenstow, North Cornwall, England. Eight shillings a yr.

The appearance of the first issue of *VVV* brings up the question of an art movement. To what extent does it "inspire" to creation? To what

*This lack is what makes their definitions of "capitalism" arbitrary. The definitions are not part of a *theory* of either the occurrence of crisis in the "old" order or its non-occurrence in the "new": yet susceptibility to crisis is the point actually at issue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extent does it place obstacles in the way of the artist? Do the "great" men anticipate the movement (Picasso, Chirico) and does the movement function mainly as a critical one, that is, elucidates, makes coherent the fragmented, instinctual findings, etc.? Does the remaining body tend to become an academy? (Breton appears not a little concerned with this possibility.)

"Greatness does not show itself in pushing to any one extreme, but in straddling opposites and filling all the middle ground." We would not always agree with Pascal's remark. We would need to know the historical moment: the extreme polemic at a time of complacency, or extreme scepticism at a time of credulity may very well become acts of greatness for us. (At any rate, Baudelaire eludes the principle if Gide or Rouault do not.) Nevertheless, Pascal's statement seems just with regard to Surrealism as it shows itself through its magazine.

VVV not only doesn't fill in the middle ground, it doesn't have any. In this instance, the absence of middle ground tends to destroy even the edges that it does have. It is a knife that cuts two ways into the magazine. Naturally one doesn't expect to find an analysis of the economy of the U.S.S.R. nor does one expect an analysis of the dynamics of British policy, etc. But it is shocking not to detect the semblance of an article on poetry, criticism, metaphysics, philosophy, literature; or any work that is substantial, thorough, comprehensive, dedicated to some significant, contemporary problem. Nothing. It gives the magazine a floating quality and a peculiar timelessness and spacelessness, without urgency or imminence. To repeat, even the edges tend to disappear—and this is the second cutting. For what is in itself an interesting curio, a side-light, a corner-piece (the one on Indian cosmetics, for example) is pushed out into the middle of the floor. It has to do something it can't do and consequently creates an atmosphere of depression. The magazine is composed of these fine bits of odds and ends and, because it contains little of anything else, they are forced out of their corners. My point is that these pieces would be all right as relief, as complements, as accessories. But you can't make a what-not shelf into a table. Marginalia is marginalia.

The gloom exists because these extremes are imposed on a world of quite substantial distress. It appears cadaverlike in gay costume—but the party is now a wake. The dancer performs as he always performed but that is the trouble, and he himself, if he is clever, becomes aware of the gloom.

This calls to mind a remark of Ramon Fernandez: "A belief is bankrupt when the actions that it inspires are too flagrantly out of harmony with the actual situation. . ." Lionel Abel, in what is the key statement of *VVV*, formulates it differently: "We believe that the only valid criterion of the livingness of ideas is their capacity to inspire us to creation." It would seem to me that this criterion operates with terribleness on the main body of work which follows his remarks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Breton seems to have made himself into a remarkable kind of human being. He brings to things a unique balance (unlike his movement). He appears as essentially wise and human, displaying modesty alongside of a sure poetic gift. And what is more rare, there is in him an effort towards scrupulousness that is highly dramatic, as if one were waiting for justice to point its finger. And yet I wonder if his own movement doesn't prescribe him, restrict him, force him away from the indigenous. His speculations on "The Great Invisibles" seem not so audacious or original as he expects it. And when Breton names Bataille, Caillois, Duthuit, Mason, Mabille, Carrington, Ernst, Etiemble, Peret, Calas, Seligmann, Henein, as minds "among the boldest and must lucid of our time" one wonders just how limited Breton has become. I recall the younger, less scrofulous, Pound writing, ". . . one has to (at least) observe, admit the capacities of people who like what one does NOT like. Life wd. have been (in my case) much less interesting if I had waited till Joyce, Eliot, Lewis, Lawrence, etc., complied with what my taste was in 1908."

Outside of William Carlos Williams' poem which, through its grace, its distribution of weights, becomes as indestructible as bronze, there is little to recommend. . . . Seligmann's "The Evil Eye" is casual and satisfying, and then there is an arresting picture of the flood by Kircher, a 17th century German Jesuit. . . . Peret's "The Thaw" is what makes a burlesque of surrealism: the very first lines: "The road bordered by blue trees hid itself in a well. A fine rain of red wine fell on the cottony ground. A man advancing spinelessly with quilty steps, giving anyone who watched him a sensation of softness, rose with a galaxy in his hair from the well over the spongy road. As he approached, I noted, to my surprise, that he did not have a galaxy on his head, but that his skull sweated stars, which rose into the red air and burst white." This is caprice, and evil. A sleepy child sucking its fat thumb is a model of responsibility. . . . Harold Rosenberg's piece is a miscue with the writer hurriedly chalking up, but belatedly, as is in the nature of a miscue. It doesn't get any where near the level of his usual prose and one might very well wonder whether Rosenberg wasn't doing a made-to-order surrealist job. . . . The "creatures of mythology" score-chart could have had meaning. Some of the "creative" pages of *VVV* might have been turned over to the writers and painters to say 1) what the creatures mean to them, and 2) why they respond as they do. This uncommented-upon score card as it stands is about as exciting as last year's stock reports.

That is all, more or less. The literature is inconsequential, the photographs are ordinary, the art scattered and unorganized. Maybe surrealism has had its day. It is entirely possible that those things surrealism fought for and successfully isolated have become part of a general, enlightened body of knowledge, and that a concerted, strict surrealist movement has no longer any reason for being.

Out of respect to Breton and the surrealist history, this review has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paid a good deal of attention to the first issue of *VVV*. Now, briefly, much more briefly, to some of the other magazines.

Dyn comes out of Mexico and is edited by Wolfgang Paalen. It is "progressive," uneven in content and the result is diffuseness. This in spite of Paalen who, as a writer (he paints too), has a good deal of energy and intelligence. One may disagree with Paalen's "Dialectical Gospel" but it is worth reading if only for its insights into early language.

This most recent issue of *View* is a trick upside-down affair but not offensively so. On one side is Tanguy and on the other Tchelitchew. Which one stands on his head depends on the point of view. Peret again: "But come quick and contemplate your future image before the whirlwinds of the waterspout have scattered in the platinum blond sky your hearts and livers whose buttercups already lick their chops." Come off of it, bud. Rosenberg's dialogue is provocative and presents quite squarely the questions to be asked. Tchelitchew reproduces magnificently—as black and white they are superb. On a whole, the magazine is small, precious and chatty, but it functions with a good deal of poise and confidence.

One of the editors of *Kenyon Review* only yesterday told me that funds have been received and the threat to its existence is passed. This would have been more joyous news before the present issue emerged out of the primordial mists. There is Maritain harrassing poetry, Philip Wheelwright hounding science, Mizener worrying Elizabethan art and the Hollywood movies both. "Poetry's Night" Maritain calls his piece, which is written in a style of precise ambiguity. That must be because, he says, poetry never became so conscious of itself as now. Poetry demanded to *know* (itself, I presume) which is an absolute experience, while art demands a making, which is a discrete, relative experience. "Consequently there is nothing left but to remain silent or renounce the art and the poetry." There is also a Poetry's Morn—the hope and the promise. Man must unite the conflicting forces within himself—these are art, poetry, metaphysics, prayer, contemplation—"by weeping all his tears for them, by dying for them every day, and gains thus his peace and theirs." Now it is perhaps true that the artist "weeps his tears" and "dies every day" but Maritain abstracts *suffering* from the world, from the day, from living, to bring it into a separated cell. The artist doesn't pause for meditation and he doesn't set aside an hour for tears. He works, he idles, he dreams, he acts, and each activity, each condition, is bound up with torment if there is torment, with ecstasy if there is ecstasy. The point is that weeping and dying aren't special but only integers in a long series. I must assume it is Maritain's way of restoring poetry to the church. He does say poetry is theology. Philip Wheelwright asks, "Why should we assume that reality is cut to the measure of human understanding?" But the limit of human understanding is the limit of what we can know! Or perhaps Wheelwright would grant us the right to speak if only, each time, we genuflected before the Mystery. He, too, closes with a statement about the need for meditation and prayer. Mizener uses a great deal of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rhetoric and apparatus of literary criticism to tell us we mustn't overlook the possibilities of a genuine, popular art which is the movies and that it bears some relationship to the Elizabethan drama. But he goes neither to the early Russian film (which was vigorous, experimental, original) nor to the French "psychological" film for his example. He goes to Hollywood, takes the "Great McGinty," a run-of-the-mill film whose only claim to distinction was a certain "wickedness."

Horizon, PARTISAN REVIEW's English brother, brings out a valuable issue for it carries the concluding "Imaginary Interviews" of André Gide. A second reading of this seemingly pedestrian interview reveals a great deay of "smuggled" information. The suppressed remarks become brilliant understatements and Gide is revealed through the talks as a man of exquisite insight and as one of the most remarkable critics of our age. There is also in it—one hesitates to say it—a humanness that is warming and heartening; and a sombreness seems to have settled on Gide, a grief, which has the effect of everlastingness. Koestler's "The Yogi and the Commissar" is an effort at breaking up the patterns of social behavior through a spectroscope, one end of which is the Yogi (ultra-violet) and the other end the Commissar (infra-red). It is a crude but surprisingly effective instrument. There are some witty remarks about contemporary physics. His tentative conclusion, though, is an error. He states that the pendulum swinging from rationalistic to romantic periods and back (from waking to sleep) does not contradict the conception of dialectics. But he allows for no third, or uniting, principle and so where is your dialectics? Spender admonishes the critic who criticizes poetry for what it is not and then proceeds to criticize poetry for what it is—but the demonstration is a sort of leaning over backwards with the ear delicately appreciative. I thought this rather funny though, on Alan Hodge: "he is particularly good on the weather."

Part of Katherine Anne Porter's study of Cotton Mather is featured by *Accent*. This remarkable writer never goes beyond herself (which is a good part of her sureness and clarity) and her sights are flawless and fierce. She sees objects and people with alarming objectivity and never coldly. Cotton Mather and his family are right up the alley. Kenneth Burke on Marianne Moore is just. He says, "Without this initial substantiality the 'feined inconsequence of manner' would lead to inconsequence pure and simple." It is good to read about Miss Moore's substantiality. It is good not to read about the inconsequence of manner as the real innovation, or as the main attribute, for Miss Moore is more, much more.

Antioch Review carries a vigorous, more or less orthodox, attack on Neo-Thomism. Perhaps it is lacking in subtlety but Mr. Fries makes up for that by presenting the case with a good deal of matter of factness and sound thinking.

Retort, from what I can make out of it, is a sort of pacifist, back-to-the-land, or back-to-the-small-community-unit, movement. Harry Paxton Howard in his piece "Marxism vs. Socialism" writes that the meaning of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Communist Manifesto was that "the proletariat should not plan, should not study the facts of society and of political and social organization, should not organize into cooperatives and labor unions, should not concern themselves with expanding their political and social liberties, and asserting their influence in the actual political activities of their day." This is plain distorted nonsense. Or perhaps Howard has gotten hold of the *true,* smuggled-in Communist Manifesto only one copy around.

Unhesitatingly, I applaud the League of Composers' *Modern Music.* The editor, Minna Lederman, manages to get all, or nearly all, the serious people in and around music and, at the same time, has shaped the magazine into a cultural, fighting anti-fascist weapon. It is cohesive, workmanlike. If, as I believe, Aaron Copland is the personality around which this group revolves then he, as well as Miss Lederman, earns our gratitude. Here, at any rate, one family of the arts seems to transcend fratricide.

Townsman, edited by Ronald Duncan (wasn't he a young, promising poet once?), is a trollop. I would, for a brief time, be Thersites. Here is phenomena (still phenomena on February, 1942) to whet that metaphysician of raillery! The too-much-with-us Duke of Bedford carries on: "If you suggest that what Hitler saw in the suffering and death of the German and Austrian women and children during the post-armistice blockade that followed the last war may well have made him ruthless in the steps he was prepared to take to avoid a repetition of that catastrophe for his people: if you suggest that the exploitation of Germans by individual Jews during the economic crisis may explain Hitler's anti-semitic complex. . . ." The Indian is not given his freedom and the Duke of Bedford is allowed to walk the streets of London and gibber and belch and fart. Ah, Albion!

HARVEY BREIT

Letters

SOCIAL CREDIT AND FASCISM

Sirs:

In your March-April 1942 issue, Mr. Orwell speaks of "a tendency for Fascists and currency reformers to write in the same papers," a tendency to be noted in our own night-shirt papers, but I think that Mr. Orwell through his association with the *New English Weekly* knows that Social Creditors do not include themselves in the currency reformer category; they are revolutionary, not reformist, in their social objective, and they propose to achieve their objective by a radical change in credit-policy, not by currency manipulation as ordinarily conceived.

This point has to be made because a few lines later the "pacifist" Duke of Bedford is spoken of as "one of the main props of the Douglas Credit Movement." What Mr. Orwell does not say is that the Duke of Bedford has been publicly criticized and repudiated by the Social Credit Party of Great Britain on several occasions since the war began. At the war's outbreak the Duke dropped his Social Credit, remarking privately, I am told, that Social Credit must be put into the icebox for the duration, and you will search his war-time writings and speeches in vain for any trace of Social Credit analysis of Hitlerism or the issues of the war.

Like the Dean of Canterbury, the Duke of Bedford is a Social Credit renegade; the main body under John Hargrave goes vigorously forward, its anti-fascist position defined in Hargrave's pamphlet on Mosley's British Union and its total debt-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

free war for victory steadily expounded in the weekly Message from Hargrave.

GORHAM MUNSON

NEW YORK CITY

—I am sorry if I gave the impression that Social Creditors, as such, are pro-Fascist. Certainly Hargrave and the group now running the New English Weekly *aren't. I am very glad to hear that they have dropped the Duke of Bedford, and apologise for not having known this, which I ought to have done.*—GEORGE ORWELL.

REGRETS

Sirs:

Please accept my sincere regrets for the way my book on James Joyce was advertised in your July-August issue. I also feel, though the responsibility is not mine, that I should tender my apologies to your reviewer. An advertisement is hardly the place, and—if I may say so—his review was hardly the occasion, for a critical controversy.

HARRY LEVIN

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

FASCISM—'REAL' OR 'ERSATZ'?

Dear Dwight Macdonald:

May I offer a comment on two assertions in your instructive article, *The People's Century?*

1) Among other and more important motives of Hitler's success with which I entirely agree you mention, on p. 296, that fascism offers an ersatz solution. It provides (as allegedly shown by Fromm) a neurotic relief to a "deep" craving for security which democratic-capitalist society arouses without satisfying it. Yet you will certainly agree with me that after an experience of ten to twenty years we should stop talking of fascism as a mere substitute of something else that is supposed to be the real thing. The real thing whether we describe it as socialism or as a new set of life conditions which either does not arouse or is able to satisfy man's craving for security is much less real than its fascist counterfeit. It was the dream of something which was not realized and which, in the sense in which it was originally conceived, has no chance of being realized in the future.

2) What is the point in your emphasizing, on p. 294, the distinction between fascism and "the present regimes in the Axis powers"? The phrase reminds me of the old Trotskyite distinction between the Russian workers' state and its inveterate spoilers, the henchmen of Stalin. Or of those even more venerable examples of the same fallacy by which the Lassallean socialists and the Kautskyan Marxists cheerfully accepted the progressive nature of the modern industrial (capitalist) state and restricted their opposition to its reactionary governments.

In conclusion I want to shield myself against a possible misunderstanding. My criticism applies to the distinction between an abstract fascist system and its actual form which involves the existence of the present Axis regimes. It does not apply to the distinction between the Hitler *regime and the German people. I am* afraid that Emil Ludwig, and other overeager immigrants, are doing a bad service to humanity (though possibly a good turn to themselves) by advising the Americans that there should be no difference in the treatment meted out, after victory, to the government of Hitler and to the various sections of the German people. Incidentally, the whole argument is based on that most barbarian "theory" of Hitler's by which the "leader" is supposed to represent his tribe.

KARL KORSCH

BOSTON, MASS.

—By calling Fascism an 'ersatz solution' to the impasse of capitalist society, I did not mean to say that it is not real, or even that it is not more real than socialism is today. (Though I certainly don't agree with Mr. Korsch that socialism is a mere dream, with no *chance of being realized.) I simply meant that, like a neurosis, it gives relief to the specific complaints, but not by remedying them so much as by creating a new situation which is in some ways more painful and unstable than the original one. It is in relation to the social crisis it 'solves,' not to socialism, that fascism seems to me ersatz and unreal. Mr. Korsch's second objection seems to be based on a simple misunderstanding: in distinguishing fascism from the present Nazi regime, I meant simply that fascism is an* international *phenomenon, manifesting itself in this country as well as in Germany, and not just the peculiar*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sin of The Enemy. I didn't at all mean that one can distinguish, inside Germany, Nazism from 'real' fascism.—D.M.

ON STEFAN GEORGE

Sirs:

Allow me to add a few words to the article on Stefan George in the July-August PARTISAN REVIEW. They may serve to correct some of Mr. Bentley's statements and concern only facts. They do not deal with any opinions.

(1) In 1889 George had neither written nor published "several volumes of distinguished lyrics." At that date not a line of his had been printed, only a few juvenilia circulated in a college magazine.

(2) George's father was not an innkeeper, but a wine-expert in the vine-growing Rhenish district of Bingen. The family were farmers and vintners, not small bourgeois.

(3) Mr. Bentley's rendering of my recollections (they cover a few days) conveys the impression that the poet wore a toga. I merely stated that during one symposium, followed by a reading of poems, he and the very few friends present donned something like togas, as for a solemn occasion. And I never meant that the four books that chanced to lie on his shelf during the week I visited George, represented any "choice."

(4) The line in George's poem on Leo XIII, "New salvation comes only from new love," is an allusion to one of the Pope's Latin hymns, and certainly no expression of George's love-doctrine. Its meaning is the simplest.

(5) George was the exclusive owner and editor of the *Blaetter fuer die Kunst.* This publication never served any commercial purpose, and ceased when he wished it to cease, with the Twelfth Volume. Mr. Bentley's statement that it "lived 27 years because George allowed no brother near the throne" makes as much sense as if I said that a relative of mine died at the age of 95 *because* he had only one child.

(6) The selection of names of those constituting the "nucleus formed in 1893" is arbitrary. Baron Leopold Andrian-Werburg is not "a Viennese Jew," but the son of one of the oldest families of South Tyrolese or Friulian aristocracy. His mother was Giacomo Meyerbeer's daughter. He was a distinguished member of the old Austrian diplomacy. George admired his poetry. Their personal contacts were few and loose.

(7) George's remark to me, "Look what I have made of Gundolf," was said in a kind and admiring, certainly in no "arrogant" spirit. And Gundolf always felt he owed everything to George.

(8) Mr. Bentley says, "George had this at least in common with Jesus, that he lived on his friends." As far as I know—I have never heard a different version—the poet lived on an allowance from his father, and later on his own means, being modest in his demands. At times he stayed with friends, as many of us have done.

(9) Lothar Treuge wrote lyrical poems and translated Horace. He remained quite aloof from the public. Where did he ever seek "to give George's life-view wider currency"?

(10) Mr. Bentley's information on George and the Nazis may in a small part derive from a conversation he had with me. If so, I welcome this opportunity to state that I was mistaken. I have reason to believe that some of the facts will in due course be published.

I do not belong to George's "circle," and I do not approve of Friedrich Wolter's biography. But I can't admit Mr. Bentley's claim that his essay "presents the story of George . . . in something like its true proportions."

NEW YORK CITY HERBERT STEINER

REPLY

Sirs:

It is not of course possible for an outsider like myself to put together any authoritative or definitive work on George. Not all Mr. Steiner's comments are without force; yet I still think that my essay presents more of the truth than any other. Nor am I surprised if some are piqued by my hostility to George's philosophy. To deal with Mr. Steiner's points:

1. My date is wrong. But I didn't say George *published* his early volumes. They circulated privately.

2. The English authority, Jethro Bithell, says that George's family was small bourgeois. The picture of G.'s birthplace

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Wolter's, p. 16) has a sign over the door *Wirtschaft zur Traube;* and is a distinctly shabby place which in England would be called an inn or pub.

3. There was nothing unique in G.'s wearing "something like a toga" during Mr. Steiner's visit. A friend of mine was present at a meeting of G.'s friends where *all* wore togas. And does not G.'s admiration of Rome go so far as the statement (*Porta Nigra*) that even a Roman catamite is nobler than a modern man?

4. I don't agree. The poem is from *Der Siebente Ring*, and in this book and its successors, G. re-iterates that what Jesus was to the last epoch, Maximin, or the New Youth in general, will be to the next. Compare Kronberger's own verses (which I cited) with this very poem in which G. addresses Jesus thus: "Komm heilige knabe! hilf der welt die birst/ Das sie nicht elend falle!" etc.

5. I never hinted that the magazine had a commercial purpose. Neither had *The Criterion.* But the dominant personality of Mr. Eliot kept *The Criterion* going just as the dominant personality of G. kept his magazine going; other magazines have failed through editorial squabbles. To establish that Klein was G.'s co-editor and right hand man, one need only consult Wolters (p. 42) or any bibliography.

6. I admitted that most of my essay was based on Wolters' book. The selection of names is his: see p. 65 ff.

7. One should, I am told, consult Gundolf's widow if one wants to know how far George behaved with high-handed arrogance. My own evidence is Georg Bondi's *Erinnerungen an Stefan George* where Bondi states that G. treated Gundolf as a child: if Gundolf was late for dinner, G. wouldn't bother to wait for him.

8. I don't know *exactly* how far George lived off an allowance and how far off his friends. I suggest that he was indebted to Karl Wolfskehl for much more than occasional visits. George Bondi states in his memoir that G. was his guest for three months in the year over a long period of time.

A Special Opportunity for P. R. Readers

We have obtained a limited number of complete sets (all 3 issues) of the MARXIST QUARTERLY. They are available at these prices, postpaid:

Vol. I, No. 1 (January-March, 1937) 50c

Meyer Schapiro: Nature of Abstract Art
Lewis Corey: American Class Relations
Friedrich Engels: Materialism and Spooks

Vol. I, No. 2 (April-June, 1937) 35c

Sidney Hook: Dialectic and Nature
Louis M. Hacker: The American Civil War
Lewis Corey: The Problem of Prosperity
Max Raphael: A Marxist Critique of Thomism

Vol. I, No. 3 (October-December, 1937) . . 35c

Bertram D. Wolfe: Background of Spain's Civil War
Guenter Reimann: Changes in Types of Monopoly
Meyer Schapiro: A Metaphysics for the Movies
Karl Korsch: The Principles of Marxism

OR: ALL THREE ISSUES FOR $1.00, postpaid

P. R. Book Service, 45 Astor Place, New York City

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE

KENYON REVIEW

takes pleasure in announcing that its campaign for war gifts to assure the continuance of the magazine has succeeded, thanks to the generosity of more than a hundred donors.

Enlarged to at least 160 pages, the Autumn issue will appear in late September.

The KENYON REVIEW has contracted to fill the unexpired subscriptions of the SOUTHERN REVIEW, and the editors of that periodical, Cleanth Brooks, Jr., and Robert Penn Warren, have joined our staff as advisory editors.

Although the KENYON REVIEW will continue to emphasize literary criticism, poetry, and articles on the non-literary arts and on philosophy, it expects to devote more space than hitherto to fiction, and to print at least one article in each issue on fundamental aspects of the present world crisis.

Subscriptions are now $3.00 a year, and the price of a single issue is 75 cents.

The Editors,
THE KENYON REVIEW,
Gambier, Ohio

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

9. The answer is to be found on p. 458 of Wolters. I translate as follows: "All political and social affairs in Germany were in confusion, and others of George's earlier comrades were bewildered. They were misled into the opinion that the moment had come for them to act: new levels of population, they thought, were ready to receive a new spiritual appeal and translate it into action. And so Lothar Treuge published his *Apotheosis of the Masses* in 1920."

10. My source is not Mr. Steiner but the best friend of G. in his later years, Ernst Morwitz. Here is a quotation from the preface to his George translations in Duke University Library:

"In 1933 he [G.] was offered the presidency of the Academy for Literature with an annual endowment. . . . In addition he was invited to choose any other official position he might fancy. He refused. . . . He commissioned Ernst Morwitz to reply. . . ."

Mr. Steiner seems therefore to be more wrong than right.

ERIC RUSSELL BENTLEY

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N. C.

WANTED: for young woman (university graduate) and her three-year-old daughter, a home. Preferably in country near New York, but perhaps elsewhere. In exchange: literary service (experienced), care of another child, or whatever. Address S. A., care of Partisan Review, 45 Astor Place, New York City.

NEW ESSAYS

A Quarterly Devoted to the Study of Modern Society

"New Essays" makes its first appearance with a fall issue containing the following important articles:

NOTES ON HISTORY . . . . . Karl Korsch

MATERIALISM AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM J. Harper

THE HEYDRICH PATTERN . . . . . Alpha

WHAT DESTROYED DEMOCRACY? . . . . . Julien Coffinet

MARXISM AND ITS RECENT CRITICS . . . . Paul Mattick

Marxism and Empiricism . . . A Social Democrat looks at Totalitarianism: A critical review of F. Neumann's "Behemoth" . . . M. Y. Sweezy's "The Structure of the Nazi Economy" . . . and other book reviews.

Subscription $1.00 a year; 25 cents a copy

Order from: NEW ESSAYS, P. O. Box, 5343, Chicago, Ill.

Send 25 cents for a sample copy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED